Inclusion without incorporation: re-imagining Manchester through a new politics of environment

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Introduction
In this chapter I provide an ethnographic description of political relations in the city of Manchester by focusing on recent attempts to distribute responsibility for reductions in the city’s carbon emissions. Building on approaches from the anthropology of policy, I attempt to move beyond descriptions of political relations in the city that have depicted a disjunction between a ruling political elite and a general population. Instead I focus in on the situated practice of doing politics. I describe how political, institutional and financial uncertainty have informed the formation of professional identities and relationships that traverse and complicate dualisms between: central and local government; institutional politics and political activism; and political actors and local populations. Instead of clear divisions or distinctions between different realms of political subjectivity, I suggest we find a similar struggle taking place across these different groups between the importance of inclusion and a simultaneous resistance against or questioning of a politics of incorporation. I suggest that paying attention to the struggle over how to achieve inclusion without risking incorporation might provide new directions for understanding the nature of urban politics in Manchester.

Background to the field site
The particular field of policy practice that I focus on in this chapter is the formation of the city of Manchester’s environmental policy: specifically that which came in response to the 2008 Climate Change Act. The chapter emerges from ethnographic research that I conducted in Manchester between 2010 and 2013. This research was conducted in order to better understand the relationship between the science of global climate change and the nature of contemporary political relations. I was particularly interested in understanding
the way in which the science of global climate change is affecting, reworking, reconfiguring and reinforcing how people imagine their place as agents of social change.

At the time when I started this project I had already been conducting ethnographic research in Manchester for several years. My doctoral research had been a study of an attempt by local businesses, European funded projects and local authority actors to stimulate a ‘new media’ industry in the city in the early 2000s. I also conducted research at Manchester Airport from 2003–2005, looking at the role of information systems in managing and running the airport as an organisation. In 2009 I conducted a small ethnographic project with the engineering firm ARUP, looking at the way in which they were developing city models in Manchester to assist with practices of urban planning and strategy, and it was here that I first became aware of work that was occurring in the city to reduce the city’s carbon emissions. One of the city-models that ARUP was working on was a model to monitor and predict the carbon emissions of the city’s buildings. It soon became clear that this modelling work was part of a broader conversation that was underway about the challenge that climate change posed to the city, and how that challenge should be responded to at a city level.

In 2009 Manchester, like many other cities, had signed up to a climate change action plan, which, in line with the UK Climate Change Act, committed the city to reduce its carbon emissions by 41 per cent by 2020 from a 1990 baseline. I was fascinated to discover that the action plan, entitled Manchester: A Certain Future, was established from the outset as a plan for the city and was an explicit attempt to produce a space of intervention that was not to be solely the responsibility of Manchester’s local authority. Rather the action plan was to be a plan for the whole city, outlining actions that would have to be taken by a variety of different actors, from citizens to charities to private corporations. The action plan was to be overseen by a steering group that would provide direction, galvanise people into action, and monitor progress against the 41 per cent reduction target. The steering group was to be constituted by representatives of key sustainability organisations in the city, including universities, the local authority, Housing Association s, environmental charities, consultants, freelancers and business people.

I was struck immediately by the way in which the steering group seemed to rework forms of governance that I had seen in my earlier research. In my doctoral research, the language deployed had been that of economic stimulus, of a concern with what kind of support could be providing for already existing economic processes in order to allow them to flourish. People were broadly concerned about what kinds of ‘trickle down’ benefits the stimulation of a high-tech industry sector could have on some of the more impoverished residents of the city (Knox 2003: 22).
This form of urban intervention was consistent with Manchester’s approach to economic development since the 1980s, which has been written about extensively. Since Peck and Ward’s *City of Revolution* (2002), many scholars have described the transformation of Manchester from its heyday as an industrial powerhouse, to the doldrums of post-industrial decline and, most recently, to the meteoric rebirth of the city into a flourishing cosmopolitan centre (Quilley 2000; Young, et al. 2006). Both celebrants of Manchester’s economic renewal and its many critics frequently attribute the city’s transformation to the actions of politicians, in particular the leader of the City Council Richard Leese, and the Chief Executive Howard Bernstein. With Leese presiding over a chamber of predominantly Labour Councillors, and Bernstein over a local Council which at its peak employed nearly 20,000 people, these two men have been seen as largely responsible for establishing Manchester as arguably England’s second most important city (see also chs 2 and 3, this volume).

The policies that were put in place after the 1980s, when Richard Leese and Howard Bernstein both took up important roles within the city, are often characterised, following David Harvey (Harvey 1989), as those of the ‘entrepreneurial city’ (Jonas, et al. 2011; Quilley 2000; Ward 2003a; Ward 2003b; While, et al. 2004). According to Harvey, the entrepreneurial city privileges public–private partnerships as a way of delivering public services, at the same time as focusing on wealth generation rather than the direct provision of local public services.

One of the reasons for this focus on entrepreneurial governance has been a concern with the relationship between such principles of urban governance and the impact on local populations. Supporters of an entrepreneurial approach to urban politics in Manchester have argued that public–private partnerships have been the basis for a generally positive transformation of the city, measured primarily in terms of an increasing measure of GVA (Gross Value Added). From this perspective, public–private partnerships, or the transfer of responsibility for public services to private providers, is seen to provide a welcome check and balance on the bureaucratic inertia and institutional conservatism of public sector organisations. It is seen to allow the dynamics of market competition to weed out underperforming participants and incorporate a wider range of people into decision-making processes (Bache and Flinders 2004). It is also seen as holding the potential for economic redistribution via the previously mentioned ‘trickle down’ effect. Critics of this approach, in contrast, argue that public–private partnerships are undemocratic, exclusionary and serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of the poor (Hall and Hubbard 1998; Quilley 1999; Tickell and Peck 1996). Deep social and economic inequality in Manchester remains evident for anyone who ventures beyond the redeveloped city centre with its jobs and new buildings into nearby residential areas, such as areas of Salford and East Manchester, which still suffer from
endemic underemployment. This seems for many to underscore the failure of the ambitions of entrepreneurial city policies to bring about improvement for all (Cooper and Shaheen 2008; Ward 2003b).

With this focus on charismatic leadership, public–private partnerships and the effects of these governmental structures on local populations, both the supporters and critiques of entrepreneurial governance produce a picture of the city which sets up an opposition between those who are doing the work of government with those who are being governed. Whilst this was certainly a key feature of my earlier research on economic development, my more recent work on environmental politics in the city unsettled and challenged this dualistic description of political relations in this city.

It was in the context of this understanding of the manner in which politics had been pursued in the city that I came across the *Manchester: A Certain Future* steering group. I was immediately struck by how, in contrast to the economic development practices I had observed in my earlier research, the steering group seemed to enact a rather different and less dualistic set of political relationships. Here was a group, working on behalf of the city, involving the City Council but not led by them, whose aim was to bring about a form of urban transformation that would support a move towards a sustainable future, not just for the city centre, nor even for a broader sense of the city itself but also for the global population. Here the city (including its population of residents) was to act as a political collective in order to realise a sustainable social and environmental future for all. To achieve this end, what had been devised was an explicit exercise in collaborative government. This was an experiment towards ways of producing a form of political organisation that, like entrepreneurial government, would distribute responsibility for societal change away from institutionally located governmental actors to communities, citizens and activists of different kinds. But it was to do so in a way that also problematises the characterisation of governance partnerships as simply about neo-liberal governmentality.

**The ethnographic approach**

The steering group in many ways sat at the centre of my ethnographic study, and provided a pivot around which the research revolved. I interviewed and talked informally to several members of the steering group throughout the course of the research. Some became friends and some became colleagues. I spoke to those who were not involved in the group about what they felt about this organisational form. I attended three steering group meetings and also attended one of the steering group strategy away days where the future of the climate plan was discussed. I did fieldwork in four organisations represented on the steering group – spending approximately four months shadowing
members of a university research project, five months researching climate change mitigation activities in the City Council, four months in a local environmental business and a week shadowing the environmental officer at one of the city’s Housing Association s. I also attended several planning meetings about the *Manchester: A Certain Future* plan, and participated in a one-day ‘refresh’ of the *Manchester: A Certain Future* document in 2013.

My ethnographic focus was thus less a particular and well-defined community of individuals and rather the set of social relations and practices that came to cohere around a particular policy intervention for which the steering group was responsible – the aim to reduce the city’s carbon emissions by 41 per cent by 2020. The purpose of taking this approach was to achieve a study of politics in the making (Shore and Wright 1997; Shore, et al. 2011). As Susan Wright has pointed out, ‘the study of a policy process acts as a window into changing forms of government and regimes of power’ (2006: 22). This chapter reports on the findings of my research by exploring the manner in which collaborative government was being organised, and the hopes, concerns and ambitions of those who were working to find a viable mode of doing politics in the city at this time. The chapter thus deploys an ethnographic description of policy making in order to investigate what kind of understandings about the nature of urban politics are made visible when we pay close attention to the practice of this kind of distributive governance. Whilst the description is specific to this particular network of people, conversations with others that I met during my research leads me to suggest that the findings have broader relevance for understanding of how political work is conducted within the city. The contribution of this chapter is both an exploration of the value of an ethnographic analysis of policymaking as a way into understanding cities as objects and sites of political practice, and a diagnosis of some of the key issues that constitute urban politics in contemporary Manchester.

**Environmental policy in the Council**

I begin this exploration of the practice of doing climate change policy by considering how the work of reducing carbon emissions was being approached from within the local authority itself. Although the steering group was officially responsible for the reduction of carbon emissions in the city, the local Council also had a group of Council Officers employed as members of an environmental strategy team. This team had a central role in supporting and directing the work of responding to the challenges of climate change.

The environmental strategy team, however, inhabited rather a vulnerable position within the local authority. The idea that the local Council should have an environmental policy team at all was a relatively recent development. One of those involved in putting environmental issues at the heart of Council
policy explained to me the process through which the establishment of an environmental strategy team had been achieved, telling me how it emerged in relation to a proposal to introduce a congestion-charging scheme in the city in the early 2000s. One side effect of the work that went into putting the case together for the congestion charging scheme was that Council Officers and politicians had built up strong relationships with non-governmental environment groups in the city such as Friends of the Earth. The congestion-charging scheme had been put to a referendum in 2004, but the population voted ‘no’, leaving the scheme to be disbanded. By this time however, the relationships were in place to ensure that environmental concerns in general, and climate change in particular, were ‘on-the-radar’ as far as the local Council was concerned.

The success of establishing an environmental strategy team within the local authority was not then seen as inevitable nor the result of some kind of creation of consensus amongst Councillors, activists and the population about the importance of environmental issues. Indeed, in many ways the anti economic-growth ethos of many environmentalists went directly against the dominant political currents at the time.2 In Council meetings Councillors repeatedly reported that their constituents were more concerned about waste collection and dog muck than any more general sense of the environment. The establishment of the environmental strategy team was thus not a response to general public concerns but rather a result of specific social ties that had allowed conversations to emerge and policies to gain credence in order, to quote one of the city’s Councillors, to ‘edge things forward’.

An important moment in ensuring that this ‘edging forward’ could continue came when Richard Leese, the leader of the Council, made several public announcements regarding his support for the local authority’s climate change activities. These included a foreword to the Manchester: A Certain Future document, his presence at the annual Manchester: A Certain Future conference and his involvement in the launch of an initiative called the Manchester Carbon Literacy project. Howard Bernstein was also appointed as chair of the Council’s environment committee – something that was seen as another important indicator that people working at the very highest levels of the local administration were taking environmental issues, and in particular climate change, seriously. This combination of the strengthening of social ties across groups, the buy-in of the leaders, and also statutory conditions such as the creation of National Indicator 186, which required local authorities to reduce their own carbon emissions, meant the circumstances were there for an environmental strategy team to be established. These circumstances were not, however, an indicator of the unquestionable power of Manchester’s charismatic leaders, but were rather experienced as a somewhat fragile agreement based on support that was constantly at risk of being taken away.
By the time I began my fieldwork, the viability of this team of officers was already under strain. National Indicator 186 had been disbanded when the Conservative/Liberal coalition government came to power in 2010 and this had left the environmental strategy team with no statutory responsibility to fulfil within the Council. Cuts had already been made to an energy advice centre that had been the responsibility of the team. During the course of the fieldwork, further cuts were made and in January 2013, the local authority received a ‘settlement’ from central government that outlined further massive cost reductions to be made to the local authority budget over the coming year. Discussions were common at this time among the environmental strategy team about the bleak future that they faced. People who already felt that they had to fight their case for recognition within the local authority saw a future where they would be one of the first services to be cut.

Links to ‘the centre’

This was the context for my first ethnographic insight about the way in which people working in this area of government went about doing the work of politics. Overwhelmed by a feeling of uncertainty and doubt about the circumstances of their employment – people often said that they felt they were ‘living in a climate of constant change’. In order to be able to work in this climate, these Council offers had to become adept at finding creative ways of making things happen in a constantly shifting operating environment. It was clear to everyone I spoke to that there was no money available from the local authority itself for environmental work, so the team had to find other ways of being self-sustaining. One important way of doing this was by finding ways of gaining grants and loans from central government and the European Union. A former executive member for the environment told me: ‘I think my biggest success was when I flew from the City Airport to Luxembourg to meet the top people at the European Investment Bank and came away with a commitment of €200 million to put in to our waste project’. Others meanwhile highlighted how getting involved in central government or European initiatives was key to being considered for involvement in other upcoming grants for funds.

One of the sources of funding that was established during the course of my fieldwork was an organisation called the ‘Low Carbon Hub’. It was understood among members of the environmental strategy team whom I spoke to, that city leaders had been able to negotiate central government money to establish Greater Manchester as a centre for low carbon investment and development. The Low Carbon Hub was one part of a broader agreement called the City Deal which had been brokered by Leese and Bernstein to ensure central government support for Manchester’s continued growth strategy. The leaders had argued the case that the city was likely to be a key component of
overall UK growth, promising to create some 40,000–70,000 new jobs over the coming few years. They had argued that central government needed to support the city in achieving this success. The precise set of negotiations by which the Low Carbon Hub had been set up as a spin off from this City Deal was somewhat opaque to most members of the environmental strategy team. Nonetheless, they were hopeful that this might open up other relationships and links between Manchester and central government, giving them, for example, ‘a route into the new Green Investment Bank’ (quote from member of the environment team).

As well as having established the City Deal, Manchester was also one of ten cities in the UK that were part of a ‘core cities’ group, another policy tool that enabled Manchester ‘to work as [a] partner with the government of the day to ensure the successful delivery of improved outcomes for our cities and the economy’. A central aspect of this kind of relationship with Whitehall was that it had the effect of establishing Manchester as a trusted location where central government policy could itself be tested out. One example of this kind of arrangement in the field of environmental policy came in 2013 when Manchester was chosen to trial a new central government initiative called the Green Deal.

The Green Deal was a proposal to transform funding for making homes more energy efficient from a grants-based scheme that already existed, to a complex loan-based mechanism which aimed to marketise carbon reduction by incentivising householders to invest in home-energy saving technologies. The project was in its pilot stage and a number of people working in Greater Manchester in local authorities, Housing Associations, charities and co-operatives had been working hard to put together a case for why Manchester should be one of the test locations for this project under a scheme called ‘Green Deal Go Early’. Much future funding for carbon reduction activities in the city rested on the Green Deal bid being successful.

Involvement in initiatives like the Green Deal appear on the surface to fulfil the criteria of policy entrepreneurship discussed above. They involved partnerships across the public and private sector, they entailed the devolution of power away from local authorities to other, perhaps less accountable actors, and they channelled funds in ways that could be argued to be beneficial to the centre of capital (large property owners, energy suppliers) but not to local populations. However, simply characterising this practice as policy entrepreneurship glosses over the everyday experience of those people involved of in this work. Most people I spoke to about their involvement in the Green Deal scheme started with an admission that they were uncomfortable about their involvement in this initiative. They recognised that for Manchester to receive any funding it was necessary for the city to have links and relationships with the Department for Energy and Climate Change, but
at the same time people worried about being seen as supporters of a means of funding carbon reductions which they did not agree with and did not expect to work. This was exacerbated by a tension between on the one hand a Manchester local Council that by 2015 was entirely made up of Labour Councillors, and on the other a central government that was led by a party of right-of-centre Conservatives.7

Here then we have our first hint at the need that people felt to be included in processes even when they themselves were highly uncomfortable with the nature of the policies with which they were having to be aligned. To explore this further I move in the next section to consider how officers and Councillors dealt with this tension by inhabiting a position that enabled them to be included in these discussions without becoming incorporated in the politics that these projects seemed to represent.

**The activist officer**

The good thing was that, he was immediately more trusted because he didn’t come with a local government background, he came with a voluntary sector background with really strong environmental credentials. (Interviewee, Manchester City Council)

In order for officers working for the City Council to be able to do the work of ensuring inclusion discussed above, it was important for them to define their role as officers of the local authority, inhabiting a neutral position of public servant and not one of an individual with vested interests (for more on this see other anthropological studies of bureaucracy e.g. Hertzfeld 1993; Hull 2012; Mathur and Bear 2015). However at the same time, many of the people in the environmental strategy team had been employed precisely because they brought other, more radical and activist-driven kinds of knowledge, expertise and connections to their role as Council Officers. A senior member of the environmental strategy team, for example, came to the Council after a long career working for an environmental charity. Another was seconded from the Department for Energy and Climate Change, another had a degree in geography and environmental sciences, and several others had worked for environmental charities, universities and think tanks. One of the anxieties often expressed by these officers was how they could reconcile this biographical identity, which they often saw as instantiating quite radical political hopes and ambitions, with the requirement of inclusion into central government policies and schemes outlined above and the daily practice of working in a bureaucratic organisation.

One way they did this was by defining their own role as distinct from, but complementary to, environmental charities and environmental activists.
working for pressure groups in the city. Any latent activism was expressed not in terms of personal political beliefs, but rather extended through networks of relations with other organisations in the city, which could do the work of enacting radical activism whilst leaving Council Officers to do the work of negotiating with ‘the centre’. Indeed, the broader field of environmental politics in the city was often characterised by pointing to an important but uneasy relationship between ‘activists’ and ‘officers’.

Partnerships with other organisations outside the Council had been written into the *Manchester: A Certain Future* document, and offered the potential for officers to work with activists to translate policy into practice. Here, bureaucratic or regulatory work was supported by or linked with interventions that could be carried out by people untethered by the institutional rhythms and structures of the local authority. But this idea of partnership with non-governmental others belied a more complex and ambiguous anxiety that people felt about the appropriate means by which they themselves as political actors might practice politics. Whilst a distinction between officers and activists was often asserted to point to a division between those working inside the Council and those with whom they partnered, this distinction was often more ambiguous than it initially seemed. Day-to-day conversations with those working within the Council suggested instead that this distinction served to disguise an ambiguity felt by some Council Officers about what kind of political agency they had, and what it meant to be a specific kind of political actor.

People working within the local authority were often involved with other groups outside the Council who were trying to intervene in changing the city in ways that were somewhat different to the kinds of links into the central government and European initiatives I have already discussed. Several Council employees, for example, attended events associated with a group called Steady State Manchester, which was trying to establish a form of urban policy that would not be based on GVA measures of economic growth, but would find other ways of valuing the city as a place to live and work. Awareness and involvement in such activities led some Council Officers to question and reflect on the relationship between their political commitments and the actions available to them within their role as local authority officers. The following quote is typical of the way in which people working in the Council environment team would reflect on their work:

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The reason why I love [the Council] is because I actually think that value-wise it is driven by the right things. I think it does want to drive economic growth for the greater good of the greater number. I do think it’s about there being a safety net below which nobody should fall. I do think it’s trying to embrace the green agenda. It might be limited but I think it’s trying to do these things, and I can forgive it a lot of its foibles on the basis that it’s a value-driven organisation.
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It was also through these kinds of reflections that ambivalence about the implications of involvement in central government schemes like the Green Deal was articulated.

‘Aligning’ with the public

Whilst officers and Councillors working on carbon reduction in Manchester had to find ways of linking their activities to central government, they were also concerned about the need to make their activities relevant to other people and institutions in Manchester. The local authority had formal systems for consulting with local populations but these were frequently seen as highly problematic and ineffective. Commenting on a regular public accountability session held in the City Council offices, called the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, one Councillor lamented:

We want to align with the public but we can’t. The reports that make decisions are subject to public scrutiny and public view but the sad thing is that, of course, participation in general is quite low. The number of times we get people in the public gallery for these meetings is … small.

The failures or limits of public engagement or public consultation as a means of producing public involvement in political process have been widely critiqued (see, for example, Blakeley 2010 for discussion of citizen participation). However, my purpose of drawing attention to public consultation is less to critique its failure, than to highlight the existence of a desire to involve the public and an awareness of the challenge of doing so. Recognising this allows us to see that the work of these Council employees required that they work in a space in-between relationships that would enable them access to large grants, and the commitment to serve a local population.

In Manchester, the key way in which this was achieved was in fact not through consultation, but rather through a more relational practice of partnering. To be able to justify the local political relevance of their work, Council Officers found themselves needing to cultivate something akin to the ‘flex nets’ or flexible networks described by Janine Wedel (2011) in her study of the ‘NeoCon core’ in America. Difficulties of engaging a general public were mitigated in part by relating to another public, instantiated in the form of relations with charities, universities and other local institutions.

The environmental strategy team at the City Council, like other Council departments, was working continuously in partnership with several universities, Housing Association s, local co-operatives, school, energy companies, and IT companies throughout the time I spent there. The partnerships led to the provision of research into projected local climate change and into local food chains, the creation of a carbon literacy project, provision of energy
saving advice through a telephone hotline, the provision of insulation in many houses, and so on. Through partnerships with these external organisations, the Council offers were able to bring about changes that would never have been financially supported by Council funds. Many of these projects were made possible by grant funding from research or innovation funds that supported just these kinds of partnerships.

If public consultation is a form of engagement that often seems to distance local government from the populations it simultaneously tries to incorporate, partnering was a way of incorporating others from outside the local authority directly into the process of providing Council services. The way in which this ‘partnering’ work was described was as a means of extending capabilities that were curtailed by the responsibilities that came with being situated within an institution like a local authority.

The *Manchester: A Certain Future* steering group was a perfect manifestation of this complex relationship between the local authority and a more distributed form of local politics. Whilst in official documentation the *Manchester: A Certain Future* steering group was described as a being for ‘the whole’ city, it was not uncommon to hear the same steering group referred to as a ‘stab vest for the Council’. The critique being made by this accusation was that the steering group had merely been set up as a way of devolving responsibility for climate change mitigation away from otherwise accountable local government officials onto non-elected others. By creating the institutional form of the ‘steering group’ under the guise of participatory governance, the Council were seen to have created a means of protecting themselves against charges of inaction or a lack of effectiveness. Here, by attempting to incorporate others into the work of politics that should rightfully belong to Council Officers, they were seen to be trying to defend themselves from criticisms regarding their political effectiveness.

**Operating ‘inside the tent’**

This leads us to the final section of this discussion, to consider how the organisations who were being invited to be incorporated into this distributed form of politics responded to being part of this ‘stab vest’ organisation. If there was a difficulty with these partnerships from the perspective of those who were meant to be doing the work of the Council, the difficulty paralleled the same tension that we saw as people in the Council tried to work with central government. Here in these partnerships, local authorities needed non-governmental organisations not only to be included in decision-making processes but to become incorporated into the very work of doing local government itself. Caricaturing the involvement of activist partners in Council-led initiatives run with external funding, one Council employee
tellingly characterised these external organisations as needing to be brought ‘inside the tent’. Unsurprisingly however, this was not a straightforward process.

So far I have described how the work of being a Council Officer working on environmental issues involved a consideration of political actions in terms of the importance of retaining a relationship with ‘the centre’ – be that Europe or Whitehall, and the related importance of partnering with others who help pull the work of the Council into another more activist form of local political engagement. In this final section I want to provide a brief discussion of this process of inclusion from the perspective of some of those people working in partnership with the local Council. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, Manchester’s climate change action plan was always written as a plan ‘for the whole city’. To institutionalise this ambition, the steering group was established, which was to be a governmental form which existed outside local government. Many of the people involved in the steering group were those same people or representatives of the same organisations that were partnering with the City Council on carbon reduction activities – representatives from Housing Associations, environmental charities and co-operative organisations.

As an institutional form that was neither continuous with the Council, nor fully external to it, the steering group was a fascinating site of engagement where issues of inclusion versus incorporation were being worked out. To describe this position, those who sat on the steering group often articulated their relationship to the local authority as one of ‘critical friend’. This term itself seemed to perfectly capture the tension between incorporation and inclusion that I have been exploring throughout this chapter. Friendship, in this case, indicated the existence of a relationship. It pointed to a mode of relating where individuals and institutions might be called upon to participate in funding bids, to come to events, to disseminate information and ideas and to support one another in the work that they were doing. But this friendship was not to be mistaken for consensus of opinion or intention. For whilst those around the table of the steering group meetings were in once sense open to partnership, they were simultaneously aware of the dangers of a form of incorporation that would erase difference in personal and institutional histories, intentions and desires.

Members of the steering group were from varied backgrounds. There were people from commercial property development firms, universities and small business, as well as individuals with a history in direct climate action. This meant that, interestingly, a situation had emerged where people with relatively radical left-wing political agendas found themselves working in partnership with private corporations and a Conservative government, as well as with a local government structure which itself was seen at times as incapable
of bringing about the kinds of radical social transformations needed to tackle climate change. The effects of collaboration were far from resolved, as the tension in the term critical friendship perhaps alludes. People I worked with asked on a daily basis what the implications of their partnerships were. What space, for example, was there for critique, when radical left-wing activists were being incorporated and entangled into something like the highly neo-liberal Green Deal? Whilst people involved in these kinds of relationships with local government – gaining funding from grants, and doing the work that used to be the remit of local authorities – have been termed policy entrepreneurs – considering these activities in the context of a left-leaning environmental politics, rather than in terms of urban regeneration, complicates the idea that these actions are in fact entrepreneurial at all. Instead it behoves us to pay greater attention to the ambivalence and complexity of entanglements between different kinds of political action and to the place of this ambivalence or complexity in the constitution of a field of political action in a city like Manchester.

Conclusion

As I have shown, people involved in Manchester’s urban politics struggle on a daily basis with the question of how to align themselves with others whose interests and agendas might differ from their own. Whilst collaboration and partnership is pursued in various different forms, collaborative relationships reveal the importance of questions about identity and belonging, about the relationship between pragmatism and ideology and concerns over authenticity and trust. As we have seen, the call for partnership and collaboration raises issues for people both inside and outside the Council who want access to resources to get things done but for whom there is a tension between inclusion in channels of communication, information circulation, meetings, initiatives and incorporation. This means that people find themselves becoming unavoidably aligned with those who do not necessarily stand for the same things that they stand for.

I suggest that the experiences I have recounted here have key relevance for understanding the on-going transformations of urban politics, particularly under current conditions of ‘austerity’ politics. As we attempt to understand urban politics in terms of the way in which people both within and beyond the offices of local government negotiate an environment of ‘constant change’, we would do well to further trace the tension between the importance of inclusion and the dangers of incorporation that I have described in this chapter. This, I suggest, will enable us to extend descriptions of political process in urban settings like Manchester beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to a much broader array of people involved in political processes. Once we extend
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Beyond government offices to look at the constitution of these broader networks of relations, the possibility even opens up of extending these networks to incorporate non-human actors. In this chapter I have focused on social relations between people, but once we attune ourselves to the relationships through which political work gets done, then such an approach also opens up the prospect of unravelling how policies, documents, percentages, meetings, plans, buildings and infrastructures are also at play in this process of inclusion without incorporation that I have begun to describe in this brief incursion into environmental politics in the city of Manchester.

Notes

1 See MacLeod 2011 for further discussion on the post-democratic city.
2 One active group at the time was called ‘Steady State Manchester’ and they were advocating for a non-growth focused development strategy for the city.
3 It was announced in January 2013 that some £80m of savings would have to be found between 2013 and 2015. This came on top of cuts of £170m that had already been made over the preceding two years, which had led to some 2000 job losses.
4 The City Council was invited to become part of a ‘core cities’ group at the time of my fieldwork, which offered a way of extending relationships that had been established through the low-carbon hub.
5 The other cities that are part of core cities are: Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.
7 One member of the environmental strategy team, for example, commented that since the coalition government had come into power in 2010, the relationship between local and central government had changed and that you didn’t ‘have a direct route into government the same way as you did before’. People responded to this problem of potential suspicion, mistrust and lack of a ‘direct route’ to local government by working in coalition with other councils in Greater Manchester (such as Stockport Council, which did have a Conservative majority) who would be better placed to develop this conversation with national politicians.

References


