The Greater London Authority – Interest Representation and the Strategic Agenda

Andy Thornley, Yvonne Rydin, Kath Scanlon, and Karen West

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Abstract

In this paper we report on research carried out into the first nine months in the life of the Greater London Authority - the new and innovative government for London that took up office in the year 2000. We focus on the access of different interest into the agenda setting process of strategic policy during this period. Over the last twenty year business interests have enjoyed a privileged position in relation to the strategic agenda in the city and we explore the extend to which this has continued in the new governmental arrangements. We show that there is a considerable amount of continuity in the access of the business lobby. However there is also a new political environment created by the advent of New Labour on 1997 and the election of Ken Livingstone as the first elected Mayor. We show how a consensus building approach has also imbued the new authority and led to attempts to involve a wide range of interests. We analyse this juxtaposition of business privilege and the inclusive 'Big Tent' approach and in the final section raise some question for further research.

The establishment of the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2000 was a significant step in the history of London government. Many of the features of this new institutional structure were very innovative, most noticeably the directly elected office of Mayor. In this article we focus on the opportunities for participatory access in the early stages of strategy formulation. To what extent have the new arrangements led to a new configuration of participation and who is drawn into the debate on setting the strategic agenda? In order to explore this question we focus on two dimensions. First we examine the role of business groups and whether their involvement changed significantly from the previous decade. Secondly we explore the extent to which the rhetoric of inclusion and consensus has led to new opportunities for broader involvement.

The election of Mrs Thatcher in 1979 heralded the beginning of a long political regime in which, through the propagation of a free market ideology, the interests of business were given considerable privilege. This however did not immediately result in access to the strategic policy agenda for London as such an agenda was largely missing from the political landscape. The abolition of the GLC in 1986 meant that statutory strategic guidance for the capital was limited to slimmed-down national guidelines. However by the early 1990s there was mounting concern about the lack of strategic leadership in the capital. The feeling was that London was losing out in the more competitive world by not having a voice or vision. In the new arrangements that evolved over the following years to fill this vacuum the business community was very well represented (Travers and Jones, 1997; Newman and Thornley, 1997).

It is of particular salience here that this interest to develop a more proactive approach came from local authorities representing the central area, the business sector and central government - who then collaborated. The City of London, the City of Westminster, and the London Dockland Development Corporation became very active in commissioning work on London's competitiveness (e.g. Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte, 1991; see Gordon, 1999, for a discussion of this period). In 1992 London First was set up with finance from the private sector to promote London and influence the strategic agenda for the city. Meanwhile central government was also feeling the need for London to have a strategic voice and set up the London Forum - soon merged into London First. The pattern that then followed was for London First, a body that represented business strategic priorities, to be heavily involved in central government's formulation of strategic guidance. This took place for example through leadership of the City Pride Prospectus, through advice to government on Strategic Guidance and through membership of the Joint London Advisory Panel. Our interest here is to explore whether this involvement continued in the very different institutional framework of the GLA.

It was not only the institutional arrangements of London government that had changed. Since the advent of the New Labour national government in 1997, local government in Britain was operating in a very different political climate. Under the previous Conservative governments local democracy had been given low regard, local governments were constrained, metropolitan authorities abolished, and many decisions diverted to bodies without local representation. According to Skelcher and Stewart (1993) by 1993 there were 272 quangos operating in London. The Labour government promised in their election campaign to remedy the democratic deficit created by such appointed bodies. Tony Blair promised 'a proper strategic authority for London to replace the mishmash of boards and quangos' (Blair, 1996, p.314). Thus the New Labour government promised a shift in direction in which local democracy was to be

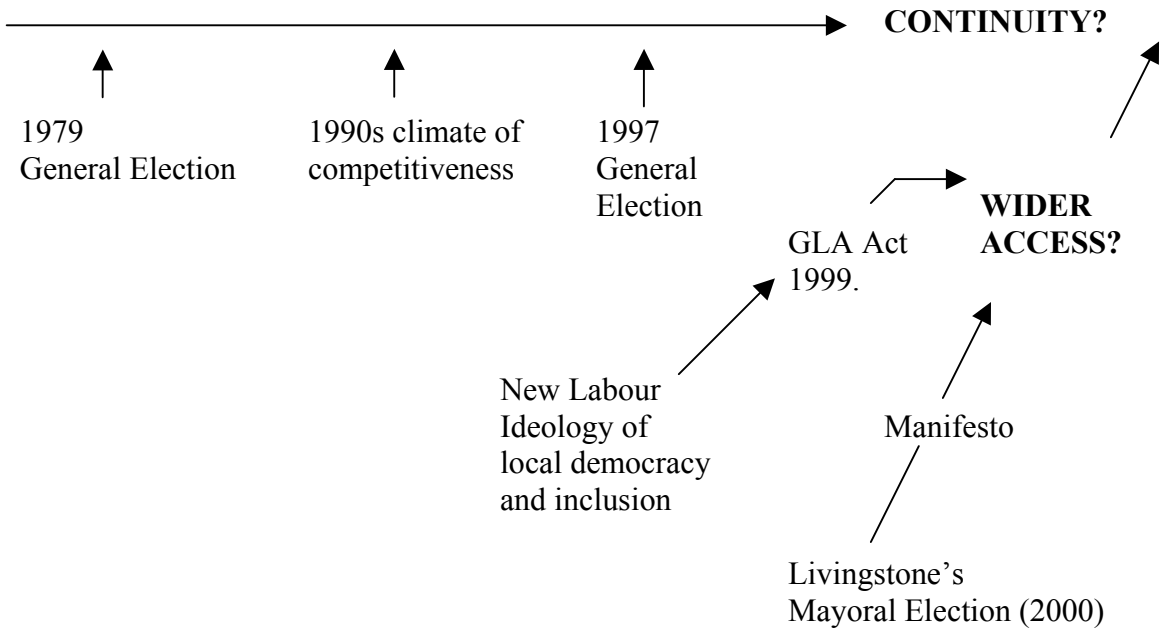
restored in importance. The modernization of local government, the attempts to rejuvenate the local democratic process and the democratization of quangos were all part of the new climate. This climate involved a more participatory, inclusive approach to policymaking. The conflictual stance of the Thatcher years was contrasted to the consensus-seeking approach of New Labour, in which everyone was regarded as 'stakeholders' in society (Blair, 1996). Later the government adopted the 'Third Way' label to characterize its approach. In his Fabian Pamphlet entitled 'The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century', Blair says 'the democratic impulse needs to be strengthened by finding new ways to enable citizens to share in decision-making that effects them' (1998, p.15). The establishment of the GLA and the idea of an elected Mayor for London are therefore part of this new democratic impulse. This inclusionary approach is embodied in the wording of the GLA Act of 1999 that set up the new government for the capital.

The election of Ken Livingstone introduced a further interesting dimension to the exploration of interest representation. There has been considerable speculation over whether Livingstone's image of 'Red Ken', acquired during his Greater London Council (GLC) days, would also determine his approach as Mayor (McNeill, 2002). One dimension of this approach concerns the relationship between the Mayor and central government and the degree to which Livingstone is constrained in his pursuit of centre-left politics. However our focus here is rather more specific. Our concern is the degree to which the new Mayor has provided opportunities for a wide range of interests to access the agenda setting process. To what extent has he taken on board the New Labour inclusionary approach? At the same time has there been any dilution of the privileged access that business interests acquired during the 1990s? The GLA Act sets out the requirements and procedures that the GLA has to adopt. In this way national government's thinking is translated into the framework within which the new London government has to operate. However the Mayor himself is also able to influence the details of day-to-day practice and has considerable scope to modify the approach that is taken.

Thus it can be argued that there are three broad contextual influences that shaped the nature of participation in the early agenda setting process of the GLA. The first stems from the structural position of business interests. Lindblom (1977) in his much quoted work *Politics and Markets* focussed on the mutual dependency that exists between business and politicians. Since productive assets are in private hands, and local authorities have ever dwindling financial resources of their own, public officials need to persuade and influence the business sector if they are to achieve their aims. They therefore become sensitive to business needs. Harding *et al.* (2000) argue that this structural factor can override changes in political ideology and they point to considerable continuity in urban policy from Thatcher to Blair. In many of Blair's statements he has shown a desire to continue the close cooperation with the business community. In his Third Way Fabian Pamphlet, he stresses the importance of responding to the forces of globalisation and that 'New Labour's partnership with business is critical to national prosperity. Business needs to be confident, successful and profitable, to create wealth, maintain and generate jobs, and support sustainable economic growth' (p.8). Thus if we accept this structural argument we would expect that under the new framework of the GLA new ways of accommodating to the business/politics relationship would be found. The second contextual influence stems from the new national political ideology that stresses the rhetoric of consensus building.

To the extent that this is translated into statutory requirement in the GLA Act this would present a further influence. The wording of the GLA Act strongly emphasises the need for the Mayor to consult with Londoners and their elected representatives before carrying out his duties. According to Section 32 of the GLA Act, before he does anything he must at least consider consulting the boroughs and the Corporation of London; voluntary bodies; racial, ethnic, or national-group organisations; religious groups; and business groups. The final contextual influence stems from the political stance of the Mayor himself. During the election this was expressed in his Manifesto and has been describes as the 'Big Tent' approach. Clearly his desire to seek re-election is a significant factor here.

BUSINESS PRIVILEGED ACCESS



These influences present the broad context within which we located our investigation of the first nine months of the GLA. We examined the opportunities during this period for accessing the agenda setting process of strategic policy formulation.

Exploring participatory opportunities gives some indication of the potential that interests had to influence priorities. However as Harding *et al.* (2000) point out it is necessary to distinguish between formal business involvement and business influence. In our research we focussed on the former – during the first nine months the mechanisms of involvement were being established. It is possible to imply a certain degree of influence from the nature of the formal access to the agenda setting process. One can assume there will be greater influence if the access is to the heart of the power structures of the organisation rather than the periphery and also if the access takes place at an early stage rather than being invited to react at a later date to draft proposals.

The GLA Act requires the Mayor to produce eight strategies and he has added others himself. Rather than trying to cover all these strategies we focused on the Economic Development Strategy, the Spatial Development Strategy and the environmental strategies. This gave us a good cross section of policies to explore covering economic,

environmental and social dimensions. We explored the way that different interests had been involved in this agenda-setting stage. So our focus was on the opportunities that these interests had to place their ideas on the table and get them discussed. We were therefore concerned with any variation in the way interests had been involved. This exploration of the first stage in GLA policy-making involved interviews with key actors in the process including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, members of the Mayor's Cabinet, members of the Assembly, officers of the GLA and representatives of interest groups. We were also able to attend both public meetings and many held within the GLA bureaucracy. In this article we first analyse the involvement of business interest and then the way that the idea of the Big Tent was implemented. In the final part of the article we relate these findings to some of the debates in the literature on the way interests engage in setting the policy agenda of cities. However first we need to outline briefly the nature of the agenda setting process.

The agenda setting process

Before exploring the relative access of interests in the strategic agenda setting process we need to give a brief outline of this process as it unfolded during the first nine months. The early months after the election in May 2000 were dominated by establishing staff and work procedures. Most of the staff in the Strategy Directorate of the GLA bureaucracy were transferred from the London Planning Advisory Committee, London Ecology Unit and the London Research Centre. A crucial point about this was that these previous organisations had been working on their own London strategies that they saw as an important input into the new agenda setting process. This was not without its tensions as we describe elsewhere (Rydin *et al.*. 2002; West *et al.,* 2002). However the principal input in the early stages was Livingstone's election manifesto. The original idea was that a London Prospectus would be produced in November 2000 in which the Mayor would build on his manifesto and develop his vision for London. This would then be used to set out guiding principles and act as the starting point for the development of the different strategies. However this Prospectus was never produced.

Meanwhile GLA staff were pressing ahead with the preparation of draft strategies. The first to be produced, in December 2000, was the Economic Development Strategy prepared by the London Development Agency. By January 2001 this was joined by the draft transport strategy – its early production reflecting the Mayor's priorities. At the same time the draft Spatial Development Strategy was submitted by the Strategy Directorate to the Mayor's office but this did not gain approval as it was said to not fully reflect the Mayor's priorities. It was decided that further work was needed on this, co-ordinated by the Mayor's office. Meanwhile a non-statutory document called *Towards the London Plan* was published in February 2001. This set out in broad terms the Mayor's main agenda. After nine months no drafts were ready for the remaining strategies. As each draft is published they are considered by the Assembly and undergo a period of public consultation.

It is important to mention here that the different branches of the GLA family possessed different degrees of decision-making power. The Strategy Directorate staffed by professionals prepared much of the draft strategy work. However this work had to be submitted to the Mayor's office for agreement. The transport strategy was rewritten after being examined by the Mayor's office and the first draft of the SDS rejected. Thus in seeking access to the agenda setting process it was far more influential to have the ear

of the Mayor's office than the bureaucracy. Access to the Assembly meanwhile was even less influential as this body was still trying to find its role and was restricted to scrutiny and reacting to draft strategies after they had been prepared.

Business interests

Business prepares

As Kleinman (2001) has reported the business lobby was generally supportive of the proposals for the GLA, although it wanted to ensure it had a voice in the new organisation. For example London First argued that 'London's prosperity and competitiveness depends on business. For London to remain competitive, business needs access to decision-making, a coherent voice to articulate its needs and the ability to make things happen. The GLA and its agencies must work in close concert with business' (quoted in Kleinman, 2001). However as Harding *et al.* (2000) suggest, business interests are not likely to seek to influence all aspects of strategic policy to the same degree. They suggest that the focus will be on local economic policy and land use planning. Certainly in the London case business interests focussed a lot of attention on economic development strategy in the lead up to the establishment of the GLA. After the White Paper on the government of London had been published in 1998 various organisations with an interest in the London economy approached central government Ministers and offered their skills and resources to prepare the ground for the London Development Agency. This Agency would be under the responsibility of the Mayor and would take the lead in preparing the economic development strategy. This idea was accepted by government and the London Development Partnership (LDP) was set up with the aim to 'establish a business-led board' that would work to 'fill the strategic gap' in economic development thinking for London (LDP, 1998a, p.2). Their first report, *Preparing for the Mayor and the London Development Agency'* (LDP, 1998b) was produced by the end of 1998 and a draft economic development strategy published in January 2000 just in time to pass on to the new Mayor (LDP, 2000). The eventual economic development strategy produced by the LDA at the end of 2000 drew heavily on this work. The LDP Board, as well as containing representatives of various public bodies, included representatives from the CBI London Region, London First, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Corporation of London. Many of these business representatives were to continue to sit on the LDA Board. The LDP Board itself had a great deal of overlap with *its* predecessor, the London Pride Partnership, and the issues it identified for priority treatment were also similar.

Meanwhile the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) had been developing its approach to the new London government. At the time the national government issued its consultation paper on the GLA in 1997, the LCCI commissioned a report from Ernst and Young (1997) on how business might best interact with the new London government. The report argued that the best Mayor would be a high profile person from the business community. Clearly this was not to happen! However other recommendations in the report are of interest and we note two of these. First that 'private sector expertise should be deployed at the highest level in the GLA – in the Mayor's office – to help develop and implement strategies' and that 'for business to have an effective role in the GLA, it must be able to speak with a single voice' (p.iii). The LCCI took up this last point and promoted the idea of a London Business Board to provide a focus for business interests. The London branch of the Congress of British

Industries and London First agreed to join this Board and they held many meetings of business interests in the lead up to the Mayoral election, producing a document called *The Business Manifesto for the Mayor and the GLA* that set out their priorities. It identified competitiveness as the key focus for the Mayor, 'The health and global competitiveness of London's economy must be at the heart of the GLA as the pre-requisite for achieving all other policy aims. All the GLA's policies must be tested against the aim of promoting a strong, stable, diverse, competitive, sustainable and flexible economy' (London Business Board, p.2). Transport was identified as 'the Mayor's key challenge and business' top priority' (*ibid*. p.5). The Mayor's subsequent document *The Mayor and Relations with the Business Community* (GLA 2000a) echoed these views and also identified competitiveness and transport as London's top issues.

The Mayor's approach to business

The Mayor's manifesto stated that Livingstone expected to work closely with the business community. He said that as Mayor he would 'work with the Corporation of London and major City institutions to ensure London remains the financial capital of Europe' and 'support jobs and competitiveness in London by working with businesses and business organisation'. He said that he would only be able to succeed if he worked 'with the active involvement of successful entrepreneurs and business people'. One of the earliest acts of his Mayoralty was to set out how this working relationship would operate. He prepared a framework for relations with the business community, drafted by management consultants KPMG. *The Mayor and Relations with the Business Community* (dated 6 June 2000) set out, in 26 pages, Livingstone's approach to working with business. The document states that 'At the heart of the Mayors job is making sure that London's success as a city economy continues. This requires more than just taking account of business issues in making decisions. It means forging an effective and productive partnership with business' (GLA 2000a, p.1). It continues that in this partnership 'the Mayor intends to share his ideas and priorities with business so that a mutual relationship between the Mayor's office and business exists at an early and all subsequent stages of policy development.' (*ibid.* p.5). The document lists seven key features of the Mayor/business relationships: openness, frankness, confidentiality, partnership, proactivity, reciprocation, and professionalism. It is worth quoting at length on the issues of confidentiality as this was particularly important in moulding the nature of the business access in the agenda setting process. Under the heading of confidentiality the report states that:

> **'**A precondition for open and frank discussion at an early stage in policy development is mutual confidentiality. In the relevant areas the Mayor will keep the details of his discussions with business confidential and will look to business to do so also. Internally within the Mayor's office the Mayor will make clear to all staff that any breaches of confidentiality destroy the possibility of dialogue with the business community and that he will expect them to respect fully the need to maintain this confidentiality.' (*ibid.* p.6).

Interaction during the first nine months

The London Business Board increased in importance after the establishment of the GLA because the Mayor made it clear that he wanted a coherent view from business and the Board fitted into his idea of a Business Advisory Forum.

London's business organisations are well resourced and have long experience in engaging with local and national government. They developed contacts with all levels and departments of the GLA, not just with the Mayor and his office, and this was something the Mayor supported. For example in *The Mayor and Relations with the Business Community*, he said '(The Mayor) also relies on business establishing strong relations with his Cabinet adviser on City and business, with senior officers of the Mayor's office and GLA, and has given specific instruction that a substantial part of the time of relevant key officers must be given over to relations with outside business bodies.' (*ibid.* p.18). Business organisations dealt regularly with officers of Transport for London and the London Development Agency and the Mayor appointed several business people to the boards of these two bodies, many of whom had also held office in the business organisations.

Very soon after his election the Mayor set up bi-monthly meetings with the London Business Board, co-ordinated by John Ross, the member of the Mayor's office with responsibility for economic affairs. Ross, a long-time Livingstone colleague who worked with him to set up a database on world economies, was the Mayor's link with the business community, along with Judith Mayhew, political leader of the Corporation of London and his City and Business Advisor. A representative of one business organisation said they were in touch with Ross "weekly if not daily." Business groups were also pro-active in arranging meetings with the GLA; for example, London First set up a series of breakfast meetings for members on issues concerning the Strategic Development Strategy, which were attended by Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron or Head of Planning Martin Simmons.

Business access to the agenda setting process can therefore be seen to have a number of significant characteristics. First it established an early presence in the process. Its activity before the Mayor was elected, through its involvement in the LDP and the London Business Board, meant that it was well prepared to instil its priorities into the process. The Economic Development strategy was the first to be drafted, drawing on this earlier work, and was therefore in a good position to influence the other strategies. Michael Ward, the chief executive of the LDA responsible for the strategy, stated that this was the aim in getting the strategy done quickly. This early involvement of the business lobby meant that it was less necessary for them to engage in the later stages of general consultation or Assembly scrutiny. The second characteristic was that the business lobby was well resourced, had clear views, and had established a single point of contact. This focussed approach was reflected on the Mayor's side also with the key role played by his advisors John Ross and Judith Mayhew. In interview the Mayor stated that his relations with the business community were wonderful and that a significant reason for this was because he only had to deal with four groups, i.e. the members of the London Business Board and the City Corporation (Livingstone, 2000b). This focussed approach meant that business access was established right into the centre of power through regular and confidential discussions.

The Mayor's Big Tent

Alongside establishing these strong links with the business community there were other activities of the Mayor during the first nine months that suggest he was taking a consensus-seeking and inclusionary approach – sometimes referred to as the 'Big Tent'.

We will look at some of these activities in turn, including his manifesto, early appointments, stakeholder involvement, the Civic Forum and the Policy Commissions.

Manifesto

During his period as leader of the GLC Livingstone had acquired the label of 'Citizen Ken'. This administration had also developed a strong approach to the participation of different groups through, for example, committees for women, disability and ethnic minorities. This background meant that many expected him to adopt a similar inclusionary approach in his new role. Certainly from the beginning of his term of office, Livingstone demonstrated a desire to reach out to all interests and bring them into the debate. As mentioned above, the Act required extensive consultation on the Mayor's eight statutory strategies but Livingstone made it clear that he wanted to do more than this. He had promised in his manifesto to 'introduce the most open, accessible and inclusive style of government in the UK'.

Most of the Mayor's major policy directions during the first nine months were signalled in his election manifesto. Thus in looking for influence on his policy agenda one dimension to explore is the way this manifesto was put together. Livingstone's late emergence as an independent candidate meant he couldn't run on the Labour Party manifesto, but had to come up with his own - one GLA officer said it was "thrown together by his small group in three weeks." His team therefore relied heavily on input from outside bodies, particularly Friends of the Earth. The Green Party also says many of the ideas were originally theirs. Business also contributed to the manifesto - Livingstone's central policy plank, the introduction of congestion charging for vehicles in central London, was described in a paper put out by London First in May 1999. Finally it should be noted that his election team now largely staff the tightly knit Mayor's office that, as we have mentioned, became the power centre of the GLA.

Appointments

In his election Manifesto Livingstone promised that his appointments would be 'based on what candidates have to offer London, not party allegiance'. Early in his term of office the Mayor announced his intention to form an "advisory cabinet" of prominent Londoners in many fields. This was his own innovation, not required by the Act. The purpose was 'to bring together some of the key players in London government and society to advise the Mayor on his decisions, to debate the key issues and challenges that we all face, and to help ensure strategic coherence across the Mayor's responsibilities' (GLA 2001c). The cabinet as a body had no executive functions and was purely advisory; it did not vote and there was no collective responsibility. Membership was by appointment, and he cast a broad net. Six Assembly members were in the Cabinet, including Labour member and Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron as advisor on spatial development and strategic planning, and Green Party leader Darren Johnson as environment advisor. Also included, as advisor on homelessness, was one of Livingstone's erstwhile political rivals, Glenda Jackson, who vied with Livingstone for the Labour Party Mayoral nomination. (A full list of cabinet members can be found in Appendix A.) As we have already noted, Judith Mayhew from the City of London Corporation was appointed as City and business advisor. The Mayor took a similar inclusionary approach in his appointments to the various Boards within the GLA. For

example Steve Norris his Conservative opponent in the Mayoral election was appointed to the Board of Transport for London; (he has since left this position).

Public and Stakeholder consultation

Livingstone announced in autumn 2000 that he would undertake a process of "stakeholder consultation" to help him formulate his London Prospectus - his vision statement. According to the Mayor, ' 'Stakeholders' are in fact self-defined: they are groups, alliances and networks which consider themselves to have a common interest in issues affecting Londoners and which have an interest in dialogue with the GLA …' (GLA 2000d). Eighteen stakeholder groups were identified as shown in Appendix B. There was inevitably a great deal of overlap in the stakeholder categories - one individual could easily belong to four or five. For example, a black working mother who was a union member and churchgoer could be a stakeholder in five categories, whereas a single unemployed man might belong to none. The stakeholder groups also varied in nature, some representing sections of society such as the elderly or young people while other were organised groups like the Trade Unions or Academic Institutions. The Mayor announced his intention to open a dialogue with each of these stakeholder groups, both about the direction for London generally and about specific strategies. John McDonnell, a Labour MP and Livingstone's deputy at the GLC, was initially put in charge of stakeholder consultation.

For each stakeholder group there was a GLA lead officer, a contact in the Mayor's Office, and a Cabinet member lead. The original consultation strategy provided for one or two meetings with each stakeholder group to discuss each draft strategy (at least 144 meetings, therefore, given that there were 18 stakeholder groups and 8 statutory strategies); in the event this was much scaled back. In order to carry out this ambitious consultation programme, the GLA needed a body in each stakeholder group with whom to consult. For some groups this was easy: the Association of London Government would represent the boroughs, and the London Business Board represented the private sector. However, many stakeholder groups had no single representative group, or no group at all. The Mayor's report said "the GLA is not establishing a set of groups but rather is engaging with existing structures where these are in place in order to develop dialogue", but in fact the GLA did help establish several stakeholder groups. These included a Black Londoners Forum, launched in September 2000 (a secondee was hosted in the GLA offices to develop its membership and organise the launch) and an Older People's Group, whose first meeting in September was addressed by the Mayor. A sum of money was set aside in the GLA Performance Budget to support "development and capacity-building of stakeholder engagement."

The results of these stakeholder consultations are unclear—no reports were published, and the meetings were not advertised to the general public. Like the work of the policy commissions (see below), the outcome of these meetings was meant to inform the content of the London Prospectus, but this was never published. It could be envisaged that the consultations fed into the preparation of the draft strategies. However consultants appointed by the Assembly, Enviros Aspinwall, reported to the Assembly's Environment Committee in November 2000 that 'It is not clear how the views expressed in stakeholder engagement have influenced the policies and proposals in the draft strategy.' Stakeholder consultation was not a time-limited process so whilst the

ideas of stakeholder groups were meant to inform the never-published London Prospectus, the groups continued to meet to discuss London policy issues.

In addition to the meetings with organised groups, the GLA arranged five sessions for the general public, covering 'Working in London', 'Growing up in London', 'Parents and Children in London', 'Older in London' and 'Young in London'. Livingstone attended each of these meetings, most of which were held at large central London venues such as the Imax theatre. They had no particular agenda, but were designed to give the public the opportunity to raise issues with the Mayor. The meetings were generally fairly sparsely attended and it was clear that most people did not have a clear idea of the Mayor's powers—many people, for example, wanted to talk about the state of secondary education in London, although the GLA has no powers in this area. The GLA Act also requires the Mayor to hold two public meetings a year to give people the chance to ask the Mayor questions. The first 'People's Question Time' took place in October 2000 and attracted about 1,500 people. The GLA also commissioned MORI to undertake a poll in October/November 2000 of 1,400 Londoners to identify the issues they were most concerned about. The key issues arising from these public meetings and polls are summarised in the GLA's first Annual Report (GLA, 2001d), another requirement of the Act.

The Civic Forum

The Civic Forum might have provided a neat way to side-step the complexity and time-consuming nature of the stakeholder consultation. Livingstone's campaign manifesto said he would 'Support the creation of a London Civic Forum as an independent and inclusive consultative body representing the private, public and voluntary sectors, London's faith communities and the Black Londoners Forum' and 'Ask the Civic Forum to organise and host the 'People's Question Time'' (Livingstone, 2000a). By July 2000 the Civic Forum, based at the London Voluntary Service Council, had a membership of 325 organisations, including voluntary and church bodies and minority organisations. Clearly there would be much overlap with 'stakeholders'. In summer 2000 the Civic Forum put together a proposal asking the GLA for a grant of £121,000 plus £60,000 in-kind and three staff secondees (the organisation's total costs were projected at £500,000 per year). In return the Civic Forum would 'focus on fostering cross-sectoral debate on key issues, increasing levels of participation in policy making and providing constructive feedback to the GLA' (GLA 2000b).

According to the minutes of the Mayor's Cabinet meeting in July 2000 that discussed the Civic Forum proposal, the Civic Forum were intensively questioned and sent away to scale back their request. In September a representative from the London Civic Forum Development Team came to address a plenary meeting of the London Assembly. He said he expected the Forum to be 'up and going' by 1 January 2001. It would be made up of five 'constituencies'—private sector, voluntary sector, faith communities, public institutions, and the Black Londoners Forum. The Forum's *raison d'etre*, however, was less clear—the representative said the Civic Forum 'is about adding value' and 'monitoring what is happening in terms of engagement'. Assembly members questioned what, exactly, the Civic Forum would do: as one member put it 'what would I say to someone on the bus tonight to Waltham Forest, having met you here today, to explain what you are going to do for them that an organisation like the Black Londoners Forum

is not going to be able to do?' and 'how are you going to be able to speak in any representative way for what is an enormously wide membership?' (GLA 2000c).

In October the Cabinet again considered the Civic Forum's request - the Forum was now asking for £70,000 - and officers recommended that the GLA grant £60,000. Although some cabinet members were still sceptical, the Mayor's cabinet members responsible for the environmental and Spatial Development strategies, Darren Johnson and Nicky Gavron, 'argued that …with tough choices coming up for the future, it was useful to have an organisation like the Forum which had undertaken to engage with 'hard to reach' people' (GLA, 2000e). The Mayor also pointed out that he had made a manifesto commitment to the Forum or a similar organisation.

Policy Commissions

Within a few weeks of taking office the Mayor announced the formation of six 'policy commissions', covering housing, crime and community safety, environment, London health, equalities, and the Spatial Development Strategy. The commissions were to meet, debate, and make suggestions about policy directions for the GLA. (A similar remit, in fact, to that of his advisory cabinet, which was announced about the same time.) These policy commissions, which were not provided for in the Act, were meant to represent the range of interests involved in each policy area. Responsibility for their composition and operation was delegated to the Mayoral Cabinet members in charge of each policy area. The criteria for including people in these commissions were unclear; some Cabinet members identified experts on their own, while others left it to officers. As a result some key officers did not think this was the most appropriate form of consultation.

The SDS Policy Commission and the Environment Commission, the ones we monitored most closely, brought together an impressive range of experts and NGOs, with some business people as well. Representation on the Environment Commission included the Black Environment Network, Waste Watch, the London Tree Officers Association, as well as the NHS and London Electricity. The SDS Commission had over 40 members divided into eight working groups, which met six times, including an away-day for key members. Meetings were not public. This commission had a stronger business element. It included architects and academics as well as developers and NGOs like the Pedestrians Association.

Most commissions published final reports, which were available on the GLA website. This was not the case for the SDS Commission - in fact, the SDS Commission was omitted entirely from the website's list of policy commissions. The final report of the Environment Commission (GLA, 2001a), chaired by Darren Johnson, contained 100 recommendations, most unexceptionable - for example, 'We suggest that the Mayor encourages walking and cycling which have great health benefits and contribute to greater equality' and 'Public transport should be accessible to all.' There were a few controversial items: the Commission said the Mayor should focus on reducing the need to travel by encouraging local employment; and should oppose 'the relentless growth of airport capacity and air traffic.' Both sat uneasily alongside the Mayor's priority in retaining London's position as a competitive world city.

The remit of the commissions seemed clear. The Environment Commission, for example, was asked 'to consider the main environmental issues facing Londoners and to make recommendations to the Mayor.' The commissions were told that their reports would form the basis of the Mayor's Prospectus, the overarching "vision" for London (never produced) - with the implication that the Mayor was open to any suggestions the commissions might make. In fact this was not the case - the Mayor had set out clear policy directions in the Manifesto and was not considering changing them. Also, GLA officers had already done extensive preparatory work in some policy areas. Because the commissions were not given a clear direction about which policies were already decided and which needed exploration, they wasted much time in sterile debate of first principles or scattershot discussion of details - as one politician put it, 'I would have preferred a more coherent overview at the start of the setting up of the commissions as to what their remit was - we've basically developed our own ways of working and remit, and I think it would have been good to have had a bit more joined-up thinking…in respect of the commissions.' Administratively the meetings were rather chaotic - at many sessions no one took notes - and it was not clear how the commissions were meant to report their findings. GLA officers were present at most commission meetings, but they did not necessarily provide a conduit to decision-makers in the Mayor's Office. Nevertheless the value of the commissions were frequently mentioned in GLA documents, for example in his introduction to *Towards a London Plan* Livingstone says 'This document has been developed with the benefit of the advice of my Spatial Development Strategy Policy Commission…' (GLA, 2001b).

The policy commissions brought together an impressive range of experts and interested people to discuss London's strategic policy issues. Although initially seen as a temporary exercise many have continued to meet in some form. It is not clear, though, what impact their deliberations have had. According to one environmentalist, 'the GLA asked people what should go into the strategies - now they're inundated and don't know how to deal with the information.' Apart from a couple of articles in the *Evening Standard* there was little press coverage of their work. Some of the experts involved said they resented having put so much (unpaid) time into policy commission work, given that their recommendations carried little weight. As we have already noted, the basis for the appointment to the commissions was unclear and they would seem to represent a random collection of expert views rather than a focussed representation of particular interests.

The nature of the Big Tent

Clearly Livingstone set out in his Manifesto to involve a wide range of interests in his development of policy. He instigated a vast range of different ways of involving the general public and different interest groups, many of which were innovative. The overall picture is that the Big Tent encompassed a wide range of different interests. For example his appointments were spread across the political spectrum including all parties and the stakeholder approach identified an interesting array of different groups in society. The Big Tent extended further than the requirements of the Act itself. However the rather scattergun approach results in overlap and lack of focus. The results of the various initiatives were not well connected to the agenda setting process and the production of the draft strategies. The main effort on community involvement in these strategies took place after their production through the consultation exercise. Rather than accessing the agenda discussions at an early stage the community was therefore in

a reactive position. The Assembly scrutiny role places it in a similar position although it tried hard to get involved at an earlier stage through pre-scrutiny discussions. The fact that the Civic Forum spent most of the first nine months trying to justify its role and gain funding illustrates its difficulty in gaining access into the early stage of priority setting. Perhaps the best indication of the role of these inclusionary initiatives can be found in the comments of the Mayor. When we asked for his comments on the consultation exercises (Livingstone, 2000b) he said that their main purpose was to get a wider consensus and legitimacy to lobby central government and to contribute to the battle to widen the GLA's powers. As for the 'meet the people' sessions, these were to help him get re-elected. When asked how much external groups influenced him in his policies, he answered that 'in areas where my mind is made up absolutely none'. This would apply to issues like congestion charging or tall buildings. However where he had no fixed views he would listen.

Discussion

The picture that emerges from our analysis is one of contrast. On the one hand the business lobby has early, focussed and central access to the agenda setting process. Meanwhile opportunities for other interests are overlapping, diffuse, not well connected to the policy making process and take place in arenas that are more distant from the centre of power.

The business privilege that was evident in the 80s and early 90s has continued to operate with the GLA. It is evident that the business lobby mobilised itself well, and at an early stage, so that they were well prepared by the time the Mayor took up office. However the political climate at the turn of the century is very different from that prevailing in the previous decades. It is no longer possible to simply argue for freedom for business, economic growth and trickle down. The political ideology of New Labour and the Third Way places a heavy emphasis on consensus-seeking and involvement. Thus one might argue that the continuation of privileged business access has to be set within the rhetoric of a broader participatory framework. In our case we would argue that business was operating its privilege in its regular and confidential meetings with the Mayor's office while in the Big Tent outside there was much noise and action, for example in the Imax cinema or the Policy Commission weekend in the country. Commendable efforts were made to hold meetings for a wide cross section of Londoners and involve many leading experts. However this kind of action did not feed directly into the discussions on policy priorities. It could even be argued that all the activity diverted and delayed a positive and more focussed input.

Livingstone is highly constrained. He has few powers and few sources of finance that he can control. He is therefore particularly reliant on business to deliver his policies. He sees boosting the economy of London as one of the few options he has to extract some social benefits. Encouraging tall building and then extracting planning gain could be seen in this light (McNeill, 2002), as could the policy to extract the maximum amount of affordable housing from new residential developments. The story of the development of the Spatial Development Strategy is also interesting here. The early drafts, prepared by the Strategy Directorate, built upon the previous work of the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC), with its dominant input from the London Boroughs (LPAC, 2000). Although the Policy Commissions and the stakeholders meetings were uncoordinated and lacking in focus, some of the LPAC ideas would have found their

way into these drafts. However in February 2001, the Mayor's office rejected all this work because it did not reflect the political priorities of the Mayor. Instead the Mayor's office quickly produced its own non-statutory document, *Towards the London Plan,* which stressed the overriding importance of competition and the need for London to promote its World City functions. One of the Mayor's economic advisors claimed that economic growth had to be established before environmental issues could be tackled. Such views might explain the slow progress on the environmental strategies

However although constrained and hence pushed towards such a boosterist position, Livingstone also has to maintain his political support for re-election. As with Blair at the national level, this requires appealing to a wide cross section of the electorate, especially given the varied social structure of the city. Thus both Blair and Livingstone are combining collaboration with business, presented as necessary because of increasing competition in a globalised world, with an approach that is consensus-seeking and participatory.

In this final section we make some comments about the relationship between these findings and two conceptual frameworks that we think could be useful in exploring these issues further, namely regime theory and theories of collective action. Regime theory is a fairly recent development in a long line of investigation and theoretical debate about the way business interests interact with urban decision-making. This line can be traced back to the community power debates of the 1950s and 60s in the United States. The interest in this area of analysis was picked up again in the mid- 1970s through the work of Harvey Molotch and the concept of the growth machine (Molotch, 1976; Logan and Molotch, 1987). The growth machine concept focussed on the role of local business, particularly the property owning element, in promoting a growth strategy for the city and mobilising other actors into supporting this. Stone's work on Atlanta (1989), in which he formulated the concept of the urban regime, provided a wider framework of potential actors involved in influencing urban decisions. Although the urban regime concept allows non-business interests to form part of the dominant urban regime, it is usually accepted that the most common form of regime is that with a significant business element. However in an urban regime the leading role is often taken my the public sector, which then works through informal channels with private interests in putting together a coalition that can maintain decision-making power. The demands of these private interests will therefore play a part in the determination of the urban strategy that emanates from the regime.

This theoretical work has been developed in the United States and reflects the particular conditions of urban government to be found there. However the business/city government relationship has also generated a lot of recent interest in Britain. This has often been explored through a modification of the US theoretical work, adapting it to European or British conditions (e.g. Stoker and Mossberger, 1994; Harding, 1997; John and Cole 1998). There are some significant differences in the British case, including the involvement of central government in urban affairs, the lack of links between business and local areas and political party machines and the greater role of the bureaucracy. London has additional complications due to its size and the division of political responsibility including 32 Boroughs and the City Corporation. Thus it is difficult to utilise the urban regime concept in its pure form in London. Between 1986 and 2000 there was no political entity for London as a whole around which to build an urban regime and analysts have noted the rarity of urban regimes in the Boroughs

(Dowding *et al*., 1999). Stone (2002) has stressed that regime analysis is a way of studying how issues are identified for priority treatment in the agenda setting stage of city-wide policy. Regime theory is not oriented to the analysis of particular policy areas. In this pre-GLA period the London-wide agenda was not being set by the Boroughs and there was no political body in existence for the city as a whole. The agenda was being set by central government and we can see that there were forms of collaboration between central government and private sector organisations over the vision for the city. Thus if there was an urban regime of a kind in this period it was involving central government and organisation like London First, the City Corporation and the LDDC.

However the establishment of the GLA has created a new city-wide political entity with a new focus for broad agenda setting. This raises the question of whether a new urban regime can be said to have evolved to reflect this new alignment of the agenda setting function. It might also be argued that increasing city competition in an era of economic globalisation suggests that cities will become more autonomous from central government and pursue more pro-active and entrepreneurial approaches. Le Galès (2000) suggests that as the central state involvement in cities retreats more of an opportunity arises for urban regimes to emerge. This certainly seems to fit the London case. The arrival of the GLA and the transfer and strengthening of strategic guidance function may be conducive to a new form of urban regime in London in which business interests play an important part. Once it was clear from 1997 onwards that a new government for London would be created, business lobbies started to reorient their attention away from central government towards the new Mayor.

They placed considerable attention on gaining access to the new power centre and reorganising their own representation into the London Business Board, giving considerable focus to their involvement. Meanwhile the Mayor recognised the importance of his relationship to the all-important financial sector and provided the City of London's leader with a central position as his business advisor on the Cabinet. What ensued was a very tight and closed coalition between the Mayor's office, the City of London and the London Business Board. The priorities identified by the business lobbies were inserted into the agenda setting process through the London Development Partnership, the Economic Development Strategy and the Mayor's agenda for the London Plan. These priorities were well entrenched at an early stage in the process and can be contrasted with the loosely evolving and poorly focused broader agenda in the Big Tent activities.

The problems faced by pursuing a broader social inclusiveness strategy via the Big Tent are better explained using the concept of collective action problems. This concept derives from the rational choice school of political science, although it can readily be interpreted within a broader framework focussing on institutions rather than rational, self-regarding individuals (Dunleavy, 1991). The classic work by Mancur Olson - *The Logic of Collective Action* (1961) - identifies the cause of low levels of participation as an imbalance between the costs and benefits of participating. Taking the standpoint of an individual or organisation deciding whether to participate or not, rational choice suggests a need to consider whether the benefits outweigh the costs or not. Among the costs of participating are counted the time, effort and money expended, any transport and childcare costs and any administrative support needed to co-ordinate and promote people's or organisations' views. These can be readily accounted for and are a certain, foreseeable burden of participating. The benefits are less foreseeable and certain. They

relate to the perceived likelihood of participation changing the policy outcomes, compared to that individual or organisation not participating. They are judged in terms of the value added of each individual or organisation joining in the participation exercise. The comparison is with that individual or organisation free-riding on the participation efforts of others.

Looked at in this way, it is clear that public participation will be quite difficult to achieve in any considerable numbers. Only those with low costs of joining in – such as the retired or unemployed who have time on their hands - or those with higher incomes - able to cover the costs of involvement – will be able balance uncertain benefits. Low-income working single parents, for example, are much less likely to achieve this balance. We have also seen the problems that were faced by groups trying to cover the costs of participation from the GLA budget. And it is not just the skewed distribution of those willing and able to participate that is explained by the collective action calculus. Where a specific targeted issue is identified affecting a limited number of people, the impact on any specific individual is more significant and the benefits of participation more definite. It is more obvious in any particular individual's or group's interests to join in. When the agenda is undefined and generalised, it becomes much more difficult for any person or group to see why they should be involved.

For these reasons Big Tent kinds of participation are going to be very difficult to pursue successfully. The unstructured nature of the agenda for participation reduces the benefits of participation and the broader scope of people and groups that were targeted will include many who would find the costs of participation prohibitive. Against this must be set the promise that was held out by Livingstone that these forms of participation would have an impact on his policy. This would have encouraged many to overcome the costs of collective action in order to achieve this impact. However, when the Big Tent fails to deliver policy impact, it becomes rapidly and increasingly difficult to engage people and groups. Disillusionment sets in and the Big Tent empties. This kind of disillusionment is already becoming a feature of many of the participation exercises that the GLA has attempted. The lesson of the collective action literature is that a more inclusive approach to influencing the GLA policy agenda would have to go along with more targeted participation efforts, both in terms of groups targeted and policy issues addressed. Furthermore, it would need to go with more financial support for participation, or efforts at reducing the costs for certain groups facing an incentive structure balanced against getting involved.

The empirical material we have presented, together with this discussion of regime theory and collective action problems, suggests a promising research agenda for watching the future development of the GLA. The hypotheses that we are drawn to are that a business-led regime is likely to become consolidated around the GLA, building on the vision of London as a world city. At the same time, attempts to build a broader, more inclusive basis of influence on GLA policy by Londoners and London NGOs is likely to flounder unless a more considered and targeted public participation strategy is actively developed to overcome collective action problems. It will be interesting to see if these hypotheses are validated by unfolding events at the metropolitan level.

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APPENDIX A

Mayor's Advisory Cabinet Members as at 29 June 2001

Nicky Gavron*	Spatial development and strategic planning
Toby Harris*	Police
Graham Tope*	Human rights and equalities
Val Shawcross*	Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
Darren Johnson*	Environment
Judith Mayhew	City and business
Glenda Jackson	Homelessness
George Barlow	Chair of the London Development Agency
Kumar Murshid	Regeneration
Lee Jasper	Race relations
Diane Abbott	Women and equality
Richard Stone	Community partnerships
Sean Baine	London Voluntary Services Council
Caroline Gooding	Disability rights
Yasmin Anwar	Chair of Cultural Strategy Group
Richard Rogers	Urban Strategy
Sue Atkinson	Health issues
Rod Robertson	Trade union issues
Lynne Featherstone*	Liberal Democrat representative
Angela Mason	Lesbian and gay issues

* Assembly members

APPENDIX B

GLA Stakeholder Groups as at October 2000

Academic institutions
Black and minority ethnic communities
Boroughs
Children
Civic Forum
Disabled people
Faith communities
Irish communities
Lesbian and gay communities
Older people
Private sector –black and minority ethnic business
Private sector – general
Students
Sub regions
Trade unions
Voluntary and community sector
Women
Young people