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### **Governing the local: politics, practices and power.**

The local has become an increasingly favoured site for new strategies of governing the social – whether in the form of localities, neighbourhoods or communities (Social Work and Society, 2008). While such developments draw on long established discourses of the local – subsidiarity, decentralisation, community, and proximity (being close to the people) – these have been revived in distinctive forms that centre on a number of political dynamics:

1. a politics of scale (or rescaling) in which the local level is revalorised;
2. a politics of state reform in which new formations of dispersed state power are being constructed;
3. a politics of responsibility in which localities are summoned to take charge of their own affairs and well-being; and
4. a politics of depoliticisation (in which ‘ordinary people’ replace or supplement political and professional authorities).

However, it is important to stress that these strategies of governing the local do not just enact governing in pre-existing localities (Allen and Copchrane, 2007). On the contrary, the local has to be constructed as the site, subject and object of governing: it has to be defined, mapped, populated and institutionalised. In this paper I will explore some of the problems, tensions and antagonisms that appear in such processes of making up or assembling the local (Newman and Clarke, forthcoming).

These both derive from and have implications the four political dynamics noted above: rescaling, state reform, responsabilisation and depoliticisation. I will suggest that all of them – but especially depoliticisation – may both fail in their objectives and give rise to new antagonisms. For social work and other related professions, both the dynamics of localisation and the new antagonisms created add to the present sense of uncertainty.

#### References:

Allen, J. and Cochrane, A. (2007) ‘Beyond the Territorial Fix: Regional Assemblages, Politics and Power.’ *Regional Studies*, 41:9: 1161-1175.

Newman, J. and Clarke, J. (forthcoming) *Publics, Politics and Power: remaking the public in public services*. London, Sage.

Social Work and Society (2008) Special Issue on Deterritorialisation and Reterritorialisation (July).