

**Transforming sub-national economic governance in  
England : From competitive regions to competitive city-  
regions.**

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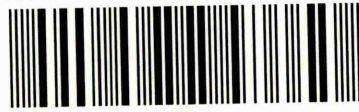
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**Transforming Sub-National Economic Governance in England:  
from Competitive Regions to Competitive City-regions?**

Alessia Ruggiero

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2013

This doctoral study is situated within key debates concerned with how new urban and regional spaces are being produced in globalisation. Emphasising the weaknesses of 'orthodox' techno-economic interpretations of the 'rise of the region', the state space approach conceives the emergence of new regional governance spaces as the result of political processes in which the state plays a key role (Brenner, 2004). While this framework highlights the role of existent scalar/institutional arrangements (and their political orientations) in channelling and delimiting political economic change, it also raises crucial questions on the role of agency. There is the need for a more developed understanding of issues of political agency and struggle in particular in relation to the shaping of particular regional governance spaces. This study explores the rescaling of economic governance in England from the early to the mid-2000s through a process of 'central orchestrated regionalisation' involving the creation of new regional and city-regional institutions and supports shaped by tensions between national political objectives and regional and local interests. In particular it considers the establishment and development of these frameworks in the context of a particular region, the Yorkshire and the Humber.

The PhD contributes to contemporary research on new regional governance spaces in two key ways. Firstly, it develops an enriched formulation of the state space through the engagement with the complementary notions of a 'politics of scale' (Cox, 1998) and regional 'armatures' (Liepietz, 1994). The value of this reformulation is in its capacity to inspire a type of multi-dimensional and multi-scalar regional research through which empirically rich, theoretically driven accounts of regional (trans-)formation can be developed in order to advance knowledge of state space.

Secondly, it provides a more nuanced account of the formation of new geographies of governance in the interplay between inherited and emergent arrangements where the tensions that emerge in this process pertain only in part to the difficulties in absorbing extant local institutional circumstances in the trajectory of emergent state initiatives. Crucially, different governance actors, at different spatial scales, frame these problems in different ways as they attempt to calibrate governance arrangements that can assist them in better pursuing their interests.

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Any faults, mistakes and errors in the following thesis remain entirely my responsibility

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# 1. Introduction

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Scale is neither an ontologically given and a priori definable geographical territory nor a politically neutral discursive strategy in the construction of narratives. Scale, both in its metaphorical use and material construction, is highly fluid and dynamic, and both processes and effects can easily move from scale to scale and affect different people in different ways, depending on the scale at which processes operates. Similarly, different scalar narratives indicate different causal moments and highlight different power geometries in explaining such events. Scale is consequently not socially or politically neutral, but embodies and expresses power relationships...

(Swyngedouw, 1997, p. 140)

Over the past 20 years economic geography has moved progressively away from the study of uneven development, the geographies of socio-economic inequality, and the role of power and politics in shaping the space economy. In our view recovering a sense of political economy is one of the most urgent tasks confronting economic geographers.

(Martin and Sunley, 2001, p.155)

## 1. A brief overview of the thesis

This study explores the rescaling of economic governance in England from the early to the mid-2000s through a process of 'central orchestrated regionalisation' involving the creation of new regional and city-regional institutions and supports shaped by tensions between national political objectives and regional and local interests. In particular it considers these issues in relation to establishment and development a particular region, the Yorkshire and the Humber (YH).

This thesis is situated within key debates concerned with how new urban and regional spaces are being produced in globalisation. Emphasising the weaknesses of 'orthodox' techno-economic interpretations of the 'rise of the region', the state space approach conceives the emergence of new regional governance spaces as the result of political processes in which the state plays a key role (Brenner, 2004).

This framework has value in emphasising the role of existent scalar/institutional arrangements in channelling political economic change. At the same time, its abstract nature leads the state space approach to privilege a focus on broad processes that generate new configurations of state power over the complex politics associated with the restructuring of particular places. The danger is that such analysis remains exposed to the accusation that from its structuralist-oriented position, new regional and urban spaces are simply 'read off' as some inevitable outcome of a hastening trajectory towards a globalising economy and hollowing out of the state. This study argues for added sensitivity towards the 'politics of place', and towards the contingent and the contextual when analysing the reconfiguration of national state spaces and new geographies of urban and regional governance. Not that this is to advocate the drift towards a morass of descriptive and empirical 'mapping' of regional and urban partnerships. Rather, this study argues for the adoption of a set of suitable meso-level concepts with which to abstract from empirical forms and engage in explanation.

This thesis contributes to advance knowledge of the circumstances in which state rescaling occurs by utilising and developing a framework for analysing the reproduction of a particular region focusing on struggles that involve actors operating in and through different scales. Disposing of a genuine multi-scalar framework allows to contribute to the debate on the new regionalism allowing explore the impact of the new state-led regional agencies in relation to its impact vis-à-vis sub-regional policy and politics of economic regeneration.

Underpinning this is an overall interest in better understanding how the dynamics of uneven development are institutionally mediated, politically acted on and discursively narrated. In relation to this, the approach adopted in this thesis reflects the view that rescaling research does not need to be an exercise of political fatalism but has the potential to stimulate the geographical imagination around how scale may come to matter in different ways.

As much as looking backwards to a ten years cycle that encases a political phase that has now drawn to an end, this study embeds also an outlook towards the future. It provides the basis for future evaluations of the spatial policies of the new

coalition government that came into power in 2010 associated with new practices and discourses of crisis recovery, for considering whether they effectively challenge, consolidate or reproduce the previous arrangements and their effects.

## **2. Theoretical context and approach**

This section presents the wider theoretical context of the thesis and sets out the research approach. The thesis reformulates Brenner's state space approach in order to provide a better grasp political agency and struggles (re-)shaping particular regional spaces.

### *2.1 The production of new regional spaces*

Some scholars have argued that the primacy of the nation-state as the key scale for economic management, the delivery of social welfare and the treatment of political subjects as citizens has been critically challenged by the emergence of new state spaces (Brenner, 2004). In regulation theoretic terms, these shifts are conceptualised as challenges, in a context of increasing global integration of capital, to the Fordist-Keynesian structure of institutionalised compromises (Jessop, 2000, 2002). Linked to this is the acknowledgement that the scalar structure of the state is significantly modified in connection with each round of crisis-induced capitalist restructuring; in other words: 'scale matters'. This notion increasingly directed the attention of geographers towards the processes involved in the production of new scales and geographies of rescaling, shaping a research agenda focused on grasping the connection between new urban and regional policy and transformations in the governance of capitalism and its territorial form. A shared tension towards disclosing the mechanics involved in the production and transformation of space has triggered a lively and on-going debate in human geography articulated around three key themes: human geography with or without

scale (Marston et al. 2005; Collinge, 2006; Jonas, 2006; Leitner and Miller, 2007), relational versus scaled territorial understandings of space (Bulkeley, 2005; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; MacLeod and Jones, 2007) and nation-state rescaling versus beyond nation-state rescaling (Brenner, 2004; Mansfield, 2005). These debates have pushed scholars to further clarify and refine the concept of scale, placing increasing emphasis on its processual and relational character such that: “the theoretical and political priority” in scale research “never resides in a particular geographical scale, but rather in the processed through which particular scales become (re-) constituted” (Swyngedouw, 1997, p.169). As scholars attempted to come to terms with a reality of fluid and changing spatial relations, two processes have come to dominate the geographical imagination: ‘globalisation’ and ‘regionalisation’. Popular discourses represent globalisation as the spreading out of economic activity with a transformation of the economic system in a borderless space of flows designing a trajectory of upward convergence and homogenisation. Another significant, if less popular, discourse associated with that of globalisation is the ‘new regionalism’. The latter encapsulates the belief that the process of globalisation proceeds in parallel with one of regionalisation. In contrast to claims of a transition to a ‘borderless’ world, the new regionalism is focused on how, through endogenous and heterodox development strategies, places can benefit from the increasing agglomeration and dense clustering of socio-economic activity. For most of the 1990s the new regionalism was the dominant discourse detailing how the region came to represent the reference point for knowledge creation, learning and innovation (Florida, 1995; Storper, 1997; Cook and Morgan, 1998; Scott, 2001; Scott and Storper, 2003) as well as key site for the promotion of an open and plural society based on participatory democracy and active citizenship (Amin, 1999; Keating, 2000).

Identified as the focal point of the Post-Fordist political economy, what conferred this new regionalism of the mid-1990s its extraordinary relevance was the fact that it also sparked intense policy activity across Europe and beyond, as policy makers attempted to situate their regions on the path towards global competitiveness transferring economic development capacity towards new regional institutions. The

Labour Government that came into power in 1997 in the UK showed it was not immune from this trend when it concentrated on the formulation of a new system of decentralised governance for the English regions to complement the devolved arrangements in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London. Seven years later however, in 2004, the rejection of the first referendum for elected regional assemblies held in the North East, not only pushed the construction of a democratic tier of regional governance firmly off the political agenda (Prescott, 2004) but also sanctioned a wider crisis of the region and Government's interest shifting towards the 'city-region'. Despite a large number of studies produced on New Labour's regional policy, including two books on the subject (Sandford, 2005; Hardill et al. 2006; Parkinson et al., 2006) the debate around the reasons for such clamorous defeat was crowded with policy centred discussions<sup>1</sup> and oriented towards the search for a new 'fix' to the territorial governance of England. The "lamentable lack of theoretical and conceptual grounding" denounced in 2002 by the political scientist Nash (2002, p.30) in relation to the proceedings of the process devolution of the UK continued to characterise the debate on sub-national governance in England in successive years. The 'empiricist' focus of many of the contributions that shaped the sub-national governance debate can be contrasted with the more 'abstract' concerns of another body of research that, taking English regionalism as an empirical reference point, emphasised the continued significance of the role of the national state in underpinning regional (and city-regional) competitiveness strategies, and particularly their dynamics and future trajectories (Harrison, 2006; Hudson, 2005, 2006; Lovering, 1999). In the same way as conceptually 'thin' approaches had shifted the focus too far in the direction of regions, these political-economic approaches shifted it too far in the direction of the state effectively risking to lose sight of the region. Both these perspectives can provide only limited insight into how and why, in England the region was

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, the series of quarterly reports produced by University College London's (UCL) Constitution Unit as part of the English Regions Devolution Monitoring Programme, for example: Tomaney et al. (2005); Hetherington and Pinkney (2004).

successfully challenged and the city-region could not provide a solution to such failing.

## 2.2 New State Spaces, political agency and struggle

Focusing on the successive scalar-organisational re-configurations taking place in one specific region, in the period from 1999 through the mid-2000s, this study contributes to a wider agenda concerned with advancing knowledge of contemporary state rescaling through an engagement with the agents and different forms of agency that shape particular regional spaces. The endeavour to fully amend the inadequacies of new regionalism's techno-economic interpretations of the rise of these emergent governance spaces drive an engagement with Brenner's spatialised SRA to state space and the search for a more 'flexible' formulation of the latter. The strength of Brenner's SRA approach for this study resides in particular in two aspects. The first is the distinction between 'state spatial projects' and 'state spatial strategies'. The second is the emphasis on the temporal dimension of state rescaling, stressing the interaction between inherited scalar arrangements and emergent strategies. The weakness of the state space approach relates to a limited conceptualization of issues of political agency and struggle in particular in relation to the shaping of particular regional spaces.

Developing further the indications provided by MacLeod (1999, also MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999), assistance to address this weakness comes from Cox's (1998) ideas on local dependence and the politics of scale in connection with Lipietz's (1994) work on the social relation of space. Through this enhanced SRA, new regional spaces can be seen can be investigated as products of struggles between different groups coalitions that operate through different scales rather than as the product of processes that operate 'behind the backs' of actors as often implied in the work of Brenner and other writers. It also this allows to understand those variegated contours which constitute the current 'world of regionalisms' (2002).

This leads to identifying the following broad aim for the thesis:

- To explore the multi-scalar and multi-dimensional production of a particular regional space, leading to some advancement in the knowledge of state space.

Beyond this broad aim the following objectives are identified.

### **Objectives:**

- To examine the interaction between regional and sub-regional scales focusing on how, in this interaction, some ideas, strategies and institutions are 'selected' and others discarded.
- To explore the significance of path-dependency or of the orientation of existing institutions in relation to the realisation of new institutional initiatives.
- To develop a set of dimensions that can be utilised a framework for exploring new regional spaces so as to contribute to the advancement of an 'enriched' state space approach more sensitive to contingency and politics.

Finally, these objectives are translated into the following research questions to better guide the empirical analysis.

### **Research Questions**

- How did the establishment of new centrally-led regional agencies impact on local and sub-regional coalition and strategies and related spaces of dependence?

- To what extent and how the orientation of existing institutional arrangements and the strategies of local actors can modify or subvert regional strategies and priorities?
- How did the new city-regional agendas impact on sub-regional working and processes of sub-regional alliance formation?

### **3. A Single Region Case Study Methodology**

This conceptual re-formulation of the SRA in this study is accompanied by methodological reflections around the role of concrete forms of enquiry for demonstrating and advancing knowledge of the new regional state spaces. The YH region and the Sheffield City Region (SCR) define an apt site of research for its explanatory power with respect to the key theoretical dimensions and objects of interest in this study.

#### **3.1 Concrete rescaling research and the single region case study methodology**

If questions of method or, more generally, methodology as the philosophical study of methods, are intrinsically related to the nature of our conceptualisations of the object of study, then the two, conceptualisation and methodological reflections, should naturally proceed hand-in-hand. Theoretical advancements on the production of new state spaces however have been undermined by a crucial missing link in terms of systematic methodological reflexivity. This study suggests a route for bridging this gap that involves the reconsideration of the critical realism paradigm in connection with the methodological stance of intensive case study research. Brenner (2009) recently acknowledged the need for a much clearer distinction in rescaling research between the different levels of abstraction on which this research is organised. In the context of this research, thinking about the



position of the region along the 'dialectical spiral' assists in highlighting the importance of the region as an 'in between' space as well as the continued relevance of regional research as a tool for combining knowledge of the economic and the political in the endeavour to advance our understanding of state space. A single region intensive case study provides an apt methodology for this research investigation of how different policy frameworks with their different scalar dimensions interact or come into conflict in or around the region: these type of multi-scalar and multi-dimensional connections cannot be grasped through 'chaotic conception'. The method of 'rational abstraction' allows us to preserve sensitivity towards the uniqueness of the region, and to establish the necessary connections with other scales. This research strategy defines a process of case selection based on explanatory power with respect to the key theoretical dimensions and objects which are the focus of this study.

### 3.2 The Yorkshire and the Humber Region

The YH region and the Sheffield City Region provide an appropriate site of research for considering the historically embedded nature of state spatial restructuring. The new regional policy framework of the New Labour Government faced peculiar challenges, in terms of both extent and nature, in encountering the political, institutional and economic structures of the YH region.

When the new RDA in 1999 pronounced its aspiration to produce a radical improvement in the YH economy (Yorkshire Forward, 1999) it faced the challenge of an economic landscape that accounted for the 7.5 per cent of the UK's GDP and an average GDP per capita of only 88 per cent of the UK average (ONS, 1998). South Yorkshire's (SY) deteriorating GDP per capita, having fallen below 75 per cent of the EU average, had qualified the area for £740 million of EU Objective 1 Structural Funds assistance. The main socio-economic challenges in the areas affected by the new regional institutions remained those related to the deindustrialisation of the 1980s and 1990s. Economic restructuring had traced an

increasing polarisation in economic resources and quality of life, with the wealth gap manifesting especially within cities (Bruff, 2002; Gore and Jones, 2006). Crucially, the region struggled to perform competitively on each of the drivers of regional productivity identified by the Treasury: skills, enterprise, innovation and investment (see ONS, 2004).

Research conducted in the region noted that, prior to 1999, a fragmented polity characterised by dispersed urban and sub-regionally based policy networks was giving way to embryonic levels of regionalisation in connection with the instalment of the new Government Office for YH (Bache, 1999). The policy developed by the Labour Party in opposition first, and in Government later, contributed to reinforce such tendencies (While, 2000). However, other developments, such as the conferment of Objective 1 status to South Yorkshire, strengthened underlying contradictory tendencies, reinforcing close-knit networks and territorially defined identities at sub-regional and local level. These unique circumstances have led to define the YH as a “hybrid region” (Lee, 2002) and drove a case choice and design based on its explanatory power in relation to the key dimensions of the study’s theoretical framework rather than on criteria of ‘typicality’.

#### **4. Thesis Structure**

The thesis is organised into three sections in a relatively conventional manner. The first two chapters are concerned with setting the research questions and the broad ‘angle of attack’. In **Chapter 2**, a brief discussion of the ‘new regionalism’ and its weaknesses sets the scene for an engagement with another body of work in which the place-specific and custom-made institutions traditionally seen as triggers of a ‘regional renaissance’ are grounded in wider state strategies and projects. It is argued in particular that Brenner’s state space approach has value for its emphasis on the path-dependent and historically embedded nature of state restructuring. Its abstract nature however implies that the task of fully amending the inadequacies of the new regionalism, remains somewhat ‘unfinished business’.

The core research agendas are set out in the conclusions based around the need for a shift in focus, away from the broad processes underlying new configurations of state powers and towards the complex politics associated with the restructuring of particular places through more concrete based approaches. **Chapter 3** is concerned with delineating the analytical framework through which carry out the agendas delineated in the preceding chapter. Holding on to the strengths of the state space approach while allowing for a stronger purchase of issues of political agency and struggle, a more 'flexible' formulation of the approach is elaborated. MacLeod's (1999) notions of 'regional armatures' and 'politics of scale' are developed in relation to their capacity to anchor Brenner's abstract modelling to specific institutions and initiatives leading to the development of 'concrete' multi-scalar and multi-dimensional regional research capable of fully overcoming the problems of the 'new regionalism.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the practical matter of carrying out the research. **Chapter 4** unpacks the methodological choices and rationales that shaped the research approach based on a single case study focused on the YH region. It discusses the significance of the fracture between theoretical advancement and methodological reflection in state rescaling research and proposes a route to merge the two. **Chapter 5** reflects on the process of 'doing' the research in terms of the methods of data collection, the experience of actually carrying out the data collection and methods of data analysis.

**Chapter 6** opens the way to the final part of the research account that focuses on research findings and analysis of the contingent forms of agency and politics (re-) shaping the YH as a regional space of governance. Chapter 6 encapsulates, in many respects, a consolidated perspective on the UK (city-)regionalism, one focused on a National 'politics of scale' where powers and resources are negotiated between the nation state and the (city-)region. Moving beyond these somewhat familiar processes of nation state orchestration, **Chapter 7** examines the struggles that developed around the emergent RDA state spatial project as this interacted with the existing patchy sub-regional institutional landscape in the YH region. The focus is on the configuration and functioning of the RDA's investment

planning system for the delivery of the regional strategy based on four sub-regional partnerships (SRPs). In particular, this Chapter concentrates on interpreting the appearance of a 'crisis' in the functioning of this governance mechanism, the way it unfolded across the region and considers the role path-dependencies came to play in this. **Chapter 8** further develops the theme around contested regionalism based on a struggle between the RDA with local and sub-regional policy actors. It is concerned with the re-configuration of YH region in connection with the attempt to advance new economic development partnerships geared towards the networked city-region. The focus is on the re-positioning of the RDA and sub-regional and local agents as these articulate their responses to the developing city-regional agenda. **Chapter 9** provides a concluding discussion of broader themes and research agendas that emerge from the thesis.

## **2. The New Regionalism and the Production of New State Spaces**

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### **1. Introduction**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on recent regulation theory re-interpretations that have challenged 'orthodox' understandings of the 'rise of the region' as a strategic site of economic governance (Jones, 1999; MacLeod, 2001; Brenner, 2004; Harrison, 2006). Grounded in a pervasive and widely shared critique of 'orthodox' new regionalist literature, this approach is not designed to unravel new regionalism completely but aimed at igniting a 'second wave' of regional research through the development of new conceptual tools (MacLeod, 2001). The appeal of the regulation approach for studies of local and regional governance relates to its capacity to articulate economic restructuring to political and institutional processes and local and regional governance changes to transformations at wider levels (Jessop, 1990, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 1995; Peck, 1998). In the attempt to establish such connection however scholars confront the difficulty of providing interpretations of local and regional development capable of overcoming tendencies to 'read off' these scales from broader macro-structural shifts (Jones, 1997).

Similarly to the way in which the original identification of critical weaknesses in 'orthodox' new regionalist literature had sparked a first round of re-conceptualisation, it was now criticism of regulationists' understandings of space and scale that sparked further conceptual advancements providing additional impetus to the emergent reformulation of new regional state spaces. A strategic relational understanding of the state provides an appropriate backdrop against which the relations between multiple dimensions, processes, structures, flows, networks, agencies and institutions, that constitute regions as relational and political constructs can be explored. For all its contribution to the conceptual

advancement of a second wave of regional research this framework failed to express its potential for fully addressing the weaknesses of 'orthodox' new regionalism. It is argued that systematic failure to connect theoretical advancement to methodological reflection in recent rescaling research has meant that the endeavour to fully amend these weaknesses remained something of an 'unfinished business'.

## **2. The New Regionalism: moving beyond the 'orthodoxy'**

The development of a pervasive critique of 'orthodox' new regionalist interpretations of the 'rise of the region' provided the theoretical impetus for a new generation of regional researchers to pursue new avenues of research. In particular, the theoretical reflections developed around two key lines of criticism have been central: first, the accusations that the new regionalism had failed to effectively engage with its basic category, the region, and second, that it represented a poor framework through which to grasp the real connections between the regionalisation of business and governance and the transforming role of the state.

### 2.1 The new regionalist 'orthodoxy'

From the mid-1990s debates around contemporary capitalism and its geographical manifestation were dominated by claims of the emergence of a 'new regionalism' (Lovering, 1999; Jones and MacLeod, 1999; Deas and Ward, 2000; MacLeod, 2001; Rossi, 2004). Such claims related to the belief that far from representing the 'end of geography', economic globalisation entails new forms of territorialisation which anchor capital, people, institutions and technology in place and nurture nodes of dense economic, political and social activity (Storper, 1997; Scott, 1998; Scott and Storper, 2003; Cooke and Morgan, 1998). The processes of globalisation and regionalisation, it was argued, unfold together. Focusing on the

success stories identified in the uneven patterns of regional development that have emerged since the crisis of Fordism, economic geographers pointed to the increasing significance of regions as building blocks in a new globally articulated economic hierarchy, key arenas for pursuing global competitive advantage and the privileged sites of strategic economic governance (Storper, 1997; Scott and Storper, 2003). Regions (or 'industrial districts', 'learning regions', 'regional innovation systems') were represented as focal points for knowledge creation, learning and innovation. This body of work, known as new regionalism, reconsiders patterns of regional uneven development in relation to new Post-Fordist models of socio-economic development. These place key importance on local production milieus and stress the territorially embedded capacities for learning and innovation as prime determinants of socio-economic development (Cook and Morgan, 1998; Lagendijk, 2001; Moulaert and Sekia, 2003). These territorially embedded assets and the institutions and policies through which these are advanced and governed are the driving forces behind the economic regions the new regionalists see as platforms for leading edge developments in the contemporary capitalist economy (Scott and Storper, 2003).

More than three hundred regional economic development agencies were established in Western Europe during the 1990s reflecting the widely held belief among political actors that regional institutions were capable of activating processes of economic development (Lovering, 1999). This argument resonated also with a long held view within EU regional policy thinking that found its clearest expression in the discourse of a 'Europe of the Regions', popularised in the early 1990s. Though the latter never materialised in a policy plan for a Federal Union of the Regions, it contributed to promote and legitimise the multitude of institutional experiments which proliferated throughout the Union, many of which were supported by the EU Structural Funds and the principles of partnership and programming (Bache, 2004).

From the mid-1990s however increasing academic concern started building around the conceptual foundations of the new regionalism, fuelled also by reinterpretations of events unfolding in the Emilia-Romagna, Baden-Württemberg

and the Silicon Valley and by the outcomes of those policies which had aimed at reproducing the experiences of these 'exemplar' regions. While a general consensus formed around the identification of the weaknesses of the new regionalist orthodoxy, less unambiguous were indications on which route to follow in order to overcome such weaknesses.

Amid criticisms emerged the endeavour of a new generation of scholars to push the new regionalism beyond its lines of weakness. The theoretical reflections developed around two key lines of criticism of new regionalism can be seen as providing impetus to a 'second wave' of new regionalist research: first, the argument that a general lack of clarity and coherence characterised the application of their principal concept of study signalling how new regionalists effectively failed to engage with their basic category; and second the accusation of failing to fully appreciate the crucial role of the state in shaping regional processes and the related weakness in examining the asymmetries of power which frame the governance of space economies (Lovering, 1999; MacKinnon et al., 2002; MacLeod and Jones, 2001; Moulaert and Sekia, 2003). As will be shown in the following sections in the course of attempts to amend its weaknesses, the new regionalism faced other more encompassing threats. Indeed the new regionalism and more widely, the notion of the region as territorially bounded scalar entities came under vigorous attack from the theoretical perspective of those scholars who have advocated a relational approach to spatiality (Allen et al., 1998).

## 2.2 The whereabouts of the 'region'

Regional research has often been accused of a tendency to employ some of its key terms loosely, leading to imprecision and loss of meaning (Markusen, 1999; Martin 2001; McCann and Sheppard, 2003). In the context of her methodological critique Markusen (1999) coined the popular metaphor of 'fuzzy concept' to refer to characterisations lacking conceptual clarity which are difficult to operationalise. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the debate around this theme developed largely around



new regionalist ideas such as 'institutional thickness', 'institutional milieu', 'agglomeration', and 'clusters'. McCann and Sheppard (2003), for example, stressed how most new regionalist research employed such conceptual terminology in an interchangeable fashion, with little understanding of origins, differences and meaning. Lovering (1999) summed up these concerns in his critique of the 'chaotic' nature of new regionalism and its implications in terms of a lack of engagement with its supposedly foundational concept. In most new regionalist analyses the region appears as a 'medium', a context for processes related to 'learning', 'knowledge' and 'innovation', principal analytical concerns of new regionalist scholars (Paasi, 1998, 2004). Focused on problematising a selected set of processes rather than the region itself, it is hardly surprising that these new regionalists steered clear from questions of crucial interest for regional geographers such as: What is a region? What makes a region? How does it function? Such questions should not be read as aimed at a universal definition of the region. But as a call to delineate more clearly the object of study, what it is that is included/excluded from analysis as "[r]egions only exist in relation to particular criteria. They are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, they are ours (and others') constructions" (Allen et al., 1998, p.2). It is such relations that often lacked recognition in the new regionalism and, in this sense, the region can be seen as the epitome of Markusen's 'fuzzy concept', a "slippery and somewhat meaningless concept for discussing differently scaled and territorialized assemblage of processes" (Jones, 2004, p. 62). The notion of "regional directorate" in the work of Scott (1998) is a particularly effective example of the new regionalist tendency to bring together entities of very different nature, in terms of physical, political administrative and economic form. The latter are conceived to approximate empirically a cluster of economic activity coinciding within one or more metropolitan areas and its hinterland. However, the examples he then uses to illustrate such notion do not match to these economic regions, spanning from the Belgian regions and Spanish autonomous communities to the Italian Lega Nord.

It is important to consider some implications of the new regionalism's failure to problematise its basic category. For example the emphasis on coherence and integration associated with the notion of territorial embeddedness produces a tendency towards reification where necessary relations are assumed between the region, innovation, and economic prosperity (Jones, 2004). This tendency leads to accounts where regions appear to be treated as firms, endowed with the ability to act, learn and compete. Such slippage is encapsulated in another 'fuzzy' notion, that of 'regional competitiveness' (Bristow, 2005; 2011). The popular work on clusters of 'business guru' Michael Porter (2003) provides an especially striking example of the transfer of the notion of competitiveness from a unit of analysis based on the firm to one based on regions and localities<sup>2</sup>. Here, and in other new regionalist work, the equation of 'regional competitiveness' with the productivity of the firms in a territory nurtures a tendency towards a shift from the rationality of the firm as instrumental actor to the rationality of the region as instrumental actor (Hadjimichalis, 2006). These aspects of new regionalism have been extensively dissected in a rich body of critical work. But, if the limitations of new regionalism with respect to its capacity to engage with its object of study came to be universally acknowledged, less consensual was the identification of what path to follow to overcome this lacuna.

Regulationist scholars Jones and MacLeod integrated the endeavour to 'reconstruct new regionalist geography' with a related attempt to 'renew the geography of regions' (MacLeod and Jones, 2001; Jones and MacLeod, 2004; MacLeod and Jones, 2007). In the context of the latter, it was argued that issues relating to political struggle and contested social and cultural practices through which societies assume their regional shape needed to retake centre stage in the new regionalism. Paasi's geo-historical approach presented as a natural route for reconsidering 'conventions', 'institutional thickness' and 'untraded interdependencies' as historical, political and cultural constructions (MacLeod, 2001). However, when confronted with the experience of new regionalism in

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<sup>2</sup>For more extensive critical examination of the work of Porter and the concept of clusters see Martin and Sunley (2003).

England or other areas where regional agencies and partnerships were orchestrated through the strategies of nation-states, supra-national institutions like the European Union, or trans-territorial actors like multinational corporations, Paasi's approach manifested its limitations. In particular, the geo-historical approach had little grasp on those processes shaping regional economies and polities that might be located beyond the regions themselves. In this respect, the contribution of proponents of a 'relational' approach to spatiality proved more useful (Allen et al., 1998; Amin, 2002, 2004; Massey, 2005). Warning against the tendency to reify the region, these scholars emphasised the need to bring out the wider networks of political, cultural and economic processes out of which regions and cities are produced and governed. Regions, it was argued, needed to be understood as "open, discontinuous, relational and internally diverse" rather than self-contained (Allen et al 1998, p. 143). Therefore, "[T]hinking 'a region' in terms of social relations stretched out reveals, not an 'area', but a complex and unbounded lattice of articulations" (p. 65). Overshadowing the 'regional world' imagined by new regionalists (Storper, 1997), it was claimed that what mattered were connections between regions and not simply the characteristics of single regions (Massey, 2001). Therefore, Amin made the crucial point that:

in a relationally constituted modern world local advocacy ... must be increasingly about exercising nodal power and aligning networks at large in one's own interest, rather than about exercising territorial power ... There is no definable regional territory to rule over

(Amin, 2004, p.36).

This shift in the academic debate towards a fluid and relational conception of space appeared to crystallise also in the 'soft' boundaries of new city-regional and/or inter-regional spaces of governance increasingly promoted by practitioners and politicians. In the UK, since the mid-2000s, when the door seemed to close on New Labour's new regionalist project, the regional policy discourse was

increasingly permeated by the language of networks and flows and the role played by political-administrative regions a decade earlier appeared destined to be replaced by a new relational focus on cities and regions (HMTreasury, 2006). These policy developments provided a strong basis for relationalists' arguments that the governance of regions "now works through a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from networks of relations that stretch across and beyond regional boundaries" (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, p. 1163). In this form the relational approach came to represent a critical challenge to the new regionalism.

The first decade of the new century was characterised by something of a theoretical dead-lock expressed in the debate between those for whom a grammar of networks and flows puts into question the usefulness of other forms of socio-spatial organisation (territory, scale, boundaries) and those calling for a retention of territorially-oriented readings of political-economy and, when appropriate, their conjoining with this non-territorial, relational approach (Hudson, 2007; MacLeod and Jones, 2004, 2007; Morgan, 2007). The arguments of the latter camp stood on the conviction that while economic flows conformed more to a relational grammar, acts of political mobilization and cultural identity are often territorially articulated. Ultimately, it was argued, the extent to which a region was relational or territorial had to be a matter to be defined *ex post* through empirical work. In some respect, the relational approach's hasty dismissal of 'geography' mirrors the hasty dismissal of the state by part of the new regionalist literature and, perhaps, more generally, a tendency to dismiss 'old' categories through rushed claims around new 'orthodoxies' in human geography. Currently, we appear to be witnessing the emergence a new phase, one situated beyond the either/or vs. both/and stand-off. Scholars sympathetic with the latter position, moving from their argument that the methodological privileging of one dimension (networks) presented as an essential feature of any socio-spatial landscape, ignored the role of other forms of socio-spatial organisation (scale, place and territory), have begun to reconceptualise socio-spatial relations as inherently polymorphic and multidimensional (Jessop et al., 2008; Jones and Jessop, 2010). From this position, the privileging of any one

single dimension needs to be replaced by an approach which recognises that what really matters is how the relative significance of the multiple dimensions of socio-spatial relations comes together in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts. The impulse to move beyond the either/or vs. both/and debate underlies a stance focused on re-conceptualisation attuned to the evolving material and discursive meanings of scale, geography and boundaries in a transforming world (Paasi, 2004). But it also presented with the critical challenge of outlining how all this works in practice, how flows, connections, processes, structures, networks, sites, places, settings, agencies and institutions combine at the regional scale.

### 2.3 The place of the state

In some new regionalist writings which can be seen as standing under the category Lovering (1999, p.383) labels as “vulgar new regionalism”, arguments around regional resurgence were pushed to claim that new regionalism constituted a distinct post-national phase in capitalist territorial development (Hirst, 1997; Ohmae, 1995, 1999). Not all new regionalist scholars positioned themselves along these lines. Exponents of so-called associationalist regional approaches maintained the importance of retaining a macro-economic perspective (as well as a commitment to a progressive social policy) (Gough and Eisenschitz, 1996; Cooke and Morgan, 1998; Scott, 1998). This approach presented us with a re-conceptualisation of the state whereby, taking a distance from the dismantling of the previous phase of neo-liberal ideology, the state must be reconstructed in order to perform effectively as ‘animator’ of economic development. This role, the shift from direct intervention to indirect animation, it was emphasised, did not need to imply a weakening of the state. The regulated delegation of state competencies to local and regional actors might in fact result in policy goals being met more effectively, with the state possibly becoming stronger from its new enabling stance (Cook and Morgan, 1998). The problem with this body of regional research however was that it failed to follow further the indication that descended from such

insights: that the relation between the nation state and the region constituted a crucial feature of new regionalism and, as such, it certainly deserved more systematic exploration. Instead, the focus of these new regionalists' analyses remained on the supply-side infrastructures of regions and their 'unique' characteristics; it was not enough to simply acknowledge the role of the state from the 'outside', "if state activity, based on complex politics and inter-bureau issues is central to the evolution of regions, it must be built into our theories"(Markusen,1999, p. 71). Considering the region 'in isolation' and ignoring the connections with other scales in the wider system of the state can thus only provide a partial understanding of the region. In fact, following Brenner (2001), it could be said that these perspectives are concerned with a socio-spatial arena, a territory, a locale, a place rather than with the more complex construction of the region. Another generation of new regionalist scholars took on the challenge of bridging the gap between the separate conceptual rubrics, or 'islands of practice' (Purcell, 2002), of the new regionalism and 'state space'. The second part of the chapter delineates the development of this new tract of regionalist research that established "the changing functional and territorial contours of the state, and its intricate connections to the globalization-regionalization dialectic, ...as a definitive object of inquiry" (MacLeod, 2001, p. 806). While asserting the imperative of moving beyond approaches that considered the region in isolation in favour of a focus on scalar inter-relationships represented an important development it is not the same as producing a full developed analysis capable of explaining how such relationships are produced and reproduced.

### **3. The production of new State Spaces**

Recent reformulations of the new regionalism extended their focus well beyond the geography of regions, placing at the centre of the analysis the changing configuration of the state and how the restlessness of the state in some ways mirrors that of capital in its search for the 'perfect' spatial fix. This new academic

endeavour encountered further obstacles and criticisms. It is argued that while the latter have triggered further advancement and re-conceptualisation through a strategic relational approach, the reformulation of the new regionalism remained something of an 'unfinished business'.

### 3.1 The political economy of scale

The regulation approach has a long-standing tradition of seeking to integrate analysis of civil society and state institutions with analysis of economic restructuring (for an overview, Boyer, 1990). The appeal of regulation theory for studies of urban and regional governance resided in the way it provided a route to connect urban and regional governance transformations to wider transformations at national and extra-national levels. Regulationists address state restructuring or the 'hollowing out' of the state in terms of three key trends (Jessop, 1990). The first, 'denationalisation' referred to the rescaling of the state, entailing the territorial and functional reconfiguration of its economic and political responsibilities along a series of spatial scales, supranational, sub-national and trans-local. Second, 'destatisation', indicated the shift from government to governance as a range of state functions are transferred outside the formal state structure to NGOs, quangos, and the private and voluntary sector. Third, 'internationalisation' referred to the intensification of the international constraints placed on the definition of national policies. These related to the increasing importance of the international and global contexts in which the state operates, the influence exercised by international networks and policy communities and international processes of policy transfer (Peck and Theodore, 2001). This account was criticized for its lack of explanatory power with respect to the processes indicated, as providing nothing more than descriptive generalisation (MacLeod, 1997). In this and other accounts rooted in the same theoretical tradition, the analysis was prevalently conducted against the background of the Fordist crisis, conveying a portrayal of state restructuring as an attempt to respond to the new imperatives commanded by

economic restructuring. In other words, economic change creates the need for state restructuring to better meet the needs of accumulation: capitals' enhanced international mobility is seen to impose territorial non-coincidence on the state thereby weakening the states' capacity to implement macro-economic policies and regulate economic activities on a national scale. Hence new 'fixes' are sought and one outcome of this is the scalar restructuring of the state (Peck and Tickell, 1994; Painter and Goodwin, 1995; Brenner, 1999). From this perspective Brenner (1999, p.66) for example, argued that: "the current wave of state re-scaling can...be interpreted as a strategy of political restructuring that aims to enhance the locationally specific productive forces of each level of state organization" and that 'glocal' scalar organisation arises out of a

tendency towards a fusion of state institutions into the circuit of capital [that] is crucially enabled through strategies of state re-scaling, which in turn translate into reconfigured forms of local-regional regulation that enable capital to extract and valorise surplus. The resultant, re-scaled configurations of state territorial power are tightly intertwined with capital on differential spatial scales

(Brenner, 1999, p.441)

Thus urban and regional scholars in this tradition increasingly focused on the links between the state and the political economy of scale with regions and cities located in a wider politics of crisis management (Jones and MacLeod, 1999; Jones, 2001; Larner and Walters, 2002). In establishing these connections regional and urban scholars faced the critical challenge of overcoming the tendency to 'read off' these scales from broader macro-structural shifts.

These accounts of the production of new spaces of governance can be held in contrast with the continuous developments that were taking place in the theorisation of the social construction of scale from a political economy perspective. As stressed in the influential contribution of Swyngedow (1997, p.141) the political economy of scale is concerned with "the mechanisms of scale transformation and transgression through social conflict and struggle"; this process based conceptualisation aimed at replacing the focus on global-local relations with



one on “socio-spatial processes that change the importance and the role of certain geographical scales, re-assert the importance of others and sometimes create entirely new significant scales” (p.142). Scales are seen as objects, outcomes and media of political-economic struggle (Smith, 1993). Critiques from a post-structural position highlighted how despite these claims that scales are never fixed (Swyngedouw, 1997), accounts of the transformations that took place from the 70s tended to privilege scale 'per se' over the processes through which it is produced (Collinge, 2005). This critique was concerned in particular with the characterisation of scale prior to social activity as “an already partitioned geography” (Smith, 1993, p. 101) where such activity unfolds. This is contrasted with a vision of spaces and sites as 'always emergent' and subject to continuous 'becoming' through social practices (Marston et al., 2005). On this basis, it is argued that from a political economy perspective scales are treated “every bit as real and fixed as ontological givens” (Moore, 2008; p. 208). In fact from a political economy perspective scale was considered as both 'progenitor' and 'outcome' of social processes (Smith, 1993). The studies mentioned above of the transformation of the state clearly reflect the privileging of the latter aspect, scale as outcome underlining also how the post-structural critique of scale was somewhat off target.

The problems and criticisms encountered by early regulationist accounts of state restructuring triggered further advancement and re-conceptualisation as encapsulated in the SRA.

### 3.2 State Space in a strategic relational perspective

The advances in the political economy of scale literature and the insights developed by Jessop (1990) in a strategic relational theory of the state were fundamental influences for the development of Brenner's (2004) state space approach. Jessop's strategic relational approach (SRA) is based on two key concepts. First the state is conceived as a system of strategic selectivity. While state structures are endowed with specific selectivities that make them more easily

accessible to some interest groups than others, a specific group's prospects of gaining access to the resources and capabilities of the state are defined by the strategy they adopt towards it. Second, Jessop draws on Poulantzas' (1978) conception of the state as a social relation that derives its specificity from the interplay between state structures and the endeavours of social forces to advance their interests through particular structures. Thus the state as such has no power, the power of the state can only ever be realised by the forces acting in and through its internal structures, representational frameworks, and modes of interventions. From this perspective the state has no essential unity but must be unified through 'state projects' that mobilise these apparatuses behind some coherent line of thought (Jessop, 1990). States also intervene more broadly on civil society and the economy through 'state strategies' aimed at regulating the economy or shifting the balance of social forces in society (Jessop, 1990). The SRA emphasises the state as a "peopled organisation" (Jones et al. 2004) and the forces "acting in and through the state" (Jessop, 1990, p. 269); in doing so it raises the critical issue of how to conceptualise structure and agency. The SRA examines agency and structure in relation to each other and stresses differential capacities of actors. Through the notion of 'selectivity of the state' it is argued that the fact that any specific state form is more permeable to some types of social forces and more suitable to some types of political strategies than to others, is the contingent outcome of the strategies adopted by different sets of forces at a specific time and place. Although Jessop recognises the need to specify the scalar dimension of the processes touched upon by his work, the relation between actors at different scales was not explored in his work. Brenner's (2004) state theoretical analysis of contemporary state rescaling was effectively a spatialised version of the SRA and represents a significant advancement in relation to regulationist understandings of space and scale. In spatialised terms 'state spatial projects' are directed at "spatially differentiated state structures" (2004, p. 91) and attempt to endow states with a coherent and workable spatial and scalar division of regulatory labour. State projects are generally shaped by the tension between centralisation and decentralisation of the state system and the promotion of

territorial uniformity or partition. The notion of 'state spatial strategies' then refers to attempts to influence, transform, and sustain the geographies of economic development and socio-spatial struggle within one's territory. These are shaped by the contradiction between privileging particular scale or distributing responsibilities more widely and between concentration or spread of economic activity and assets. In Brenner's account, the emergence of new state spaces from the 1970s was underpinned by a process of decentralisation and the associated differentiation of economic activity across state space related to the management of inter-scalar relations. Thus devolution is understood as a state spatial project that involves the concession of state power to selected sub-state governments underscoring the nature of the state as a "political process in motion" (Peck, 2001, p. 449). This 'transformationalist' perspective provides a more subtle understanding of state restructuring as an ongoing process of qualitative adjustments (Peck and Tickell 2002). All this can be seen as beginning to delineate a framework grounding the place-based institutions traditionally seen as propellers of the 'rise of the region' in a wider political economic analysis of the increased spatial targeting of regions by contemporary state intervention in the economy and society and/or the regionalisation of the state form.

A crucial aspect associated with this notion of state space concerns the emphasis on the temporal dimension of state restructuring. The geographies of the state at any given moment in time are seen as the spatial-institutional condensation of the relation of between different economic and socio-political actors as shaped by previous struggle (Brenner, 2004). A new state spatiality is formed under the influences of the dialectical relationship between the existing spatiality of the state and the emerging political forces to change state spatiality.

Two critical aspects should be stressed in relation to this. First, the emphasis on the temporal dimension of state rescaling, highlighting how scale exists prior to emergent activity only as the outcome of preceding processes, is critical for solving the issue, mentioned in the preceding section, of the tension underlying a conception of spatial scale as both 'progenitor' and 'product' of social processes. For MacLeod and Jones (2001) argued that England's regional scale, which

originated in the 1940s in the context of the governance of a Fordist economy, should be considered both as object of state action and 'active progenitors', channelling or delimiting political-economic change; this does not mean that regions are out there, waiting to be discovered as:

[t]here is no pre-given set of places, spaces or scales that are simply being reordered. For in addition to the changing significance of old places, spaces, scales and horizons, new places are emerging, new spaces are being created, new scales of organisation are being developed and new horizons of action are being imagined.

(Jessop, 2000, p.343)

These advancements thus have an important function as they help to refute the charge of reification targeted at the political economy of scale, suggesting that this is based on selective reading of the literature that dissolves the tension between fixity and fluidity in favour of the latter. Furthermore they underline how those relational accounts that tend to characterise state space as always fluid and open (Amin, 2002; Marston et al., 2005; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Moore, 2008) might have pushed the pendulum too far in the effort to move beyond traditional characterisations of space as bounded and static (Jones, 2009; MacKinnon, 2011). But, second, this does not mean that the SRA to state space is immune from criticism. The temporal dimension of state restructuring calls for attention to be paid to, first, the impact of pre-existing structures of state spatial organisation and intervention (such as the scale division of labour, and urban and regional policies, spatial selectivities etc.) on the shape of newly constructed spatial forms of the state; second, to how these structural influences are transformed in the dialectical interaction with emergent political projects and strategies to change existing spatiality. However Brenner (2004) stopped short from filling this framework with further content providing a more detailed explanation of how the dynamics he conceptualises unfold in relation to actual spaces.

While the dimension of state spatial strategies concerned with maintaining hegemony within civil society (the need to build a social basis of support) is

extensively discussed in the context of the development of the analytical framework of the study, the subsequent empirical analysis tends to gloss over this aspect. Here, state spatial strategies are considered primarily in relation to the requirements of accumulation (see for example, p. 131). This underlines a discrepancy between questions of methodology and actual analysis, one that has also critical theoretical implications. Indeed, as effectively pointed out by Paasi (2008), questions of methods or methodology, as the philosophical study of methods, are intrinsically related to the way in which new regional spaces are conceptualised. The 'trial and error' nature of the processes behind a specific spatial-scalar fix and the 'actors that act through the state' are central to the SRA (and to its capacity to assist in overcoming the weaknesses of the new regionalist interpretation of emergent regional spaces). However, Brenner's analysis of state restructuring is characterised by a lack of mention of other political agencies and uniform references to 'national governments' or 'local states'. This gives the impression that it is the state itself that acts in the pursuit of the new globalisation strategies. It is true that Brenner's interest lies with capturing macro-change and identifying trends; this does not however justify the omission of a more developed methodological commentary on the position of his research on state rescaling in relation to different levels of the dialectical spiral (from abstract to concrete). Significantly, only recently Brenner (2009) has come to acknowledge this as a lacuna and this acknowledgement has proceeded in parallel with a call for more 'concrete' rescaling research.

General models, when rigorously accomplished, maintain an important function for elaborating 'big picture' generalisation; they have value especially in periods of volatility, with institutional readjustment, political struggles and policy realignment occurring in apparent isolation and inchoate ways. Rather than as a point of arrival in terms of explanation, they should be considered more as something of a springboard for more empirically oriented research through which to advance knowledge of how particular scalar-institutional forms are contested, challenged and reproduced through political agency and struggle.

### 3.3 Reformulating the New Regionalism, an unfinished business.

As suggested above, a transformationalist perspective provides an understanding of state restructuring as a continuous process of qualitative re-adjustments (Pack and Tickell, 2002). A rescaling project tends to proceed on a 'trial and error' basis and, as argued by Gualini (2006), this "experimental regionalism" (p. 899) requires more empirical investigation of the array of sub-state spatial projects and strategies that proliferate beside a more general model.

McGuirk (2004) considered the production of the Sydney city-region stressing the importance of analysing the political drivers of processes of (city-) regionalisation "connect[ing] theoretically informed explanation of the practical accomplishment of urban governance to its broader politico-economic embeddedness and to the territoriality of the state" (p.1039). Fixing the analytical focus on discursive practices she considered the production of Sydney as 'competitive city' and how this "is being advanced as a hegemonic project and a consensus around it tendentially secured through a practical politics and pursued through a prevailing discourse of partnership" (p.1020). The problem with this analysis however is in how the focus was on the contingent construction of city-regional governance through discourse in a context of wider neo-liberalisation. Preventing the full grasp of its contested nature, what remained under the radar however were the political struggles concerned with the spatial definition of the (city-)region<sup>3</sup>.

Based on a study of the construction of the South West region in England, MacLeod and Jones (2004) elaborated the distinction between the political mobilisation of 'spaces of regionalism' and the economic production of 'regional spaces', arguing that the production of regions requires recognition of "both a political economy of scale and a cultural construction of scale" (2004, p.448 original emphasis). Beyond this acknowledgement, there is little indication of how

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<sup>3</sup>MacGuirk (2007) subsequently recognized the need to expand the scope of the analysis of the formation of the Sydney city-region by focusing on "state orchestration, practical acts of discursive production and active mobilization by a range of actors pursuing strategic-spatial interests" (p. 180).

to proceed to understand how the 'political' and the 'economic' articulated in practice in the production of their region. As will be discussed in the next chapter, echoing what said in relation to the work of Brenner (2004), there are fundamental tensions incorporated in these scholars' endeavour to 'renew the geographies' of regions solely from a theoretical point of view.

A themed issue of *European Planning Studies* (2006) contains studies of territorial governance restructuring in various European regions including the post-devolution British regions. In each case, the authors trace the rescaling of state space within the region under study with reference to the contested evolution of institutions as well as emergent strategies of political-economic intervention. Goodwin et al.'s (2006) study of devolved territories in Britain recognises how, in line with a transformationalist perspective on state rescaling, it is no longer sufficient to refer to a unilateral 'hollowing out' of the state with power being displaced away from the national state. To complement 'hollowing out' they developed the notion of 'filling in', providing a framework for assessing the re-organisation of governance within particular territories, involving the establishment of new organisational forms and / or the reconfiguration of old ones. Rather than offering a direct explanation of the specific forms of state restructuring that occur in different regions, filling in provided a conceptual tool for examining these processes empirically (Jones et al., 2005). Like hollowing out, filling in should not be interpreted in literal terms; it does not refer simply to the creation of new state structures within devolved territories, and it can also involve a reduction in the number of organisations operating at the regional scale. Neither should the process be seen as a direct replacement for hollowing out, simply exchanging one metaphor for another. Instead, the two processes are linked in a dialectical relationship through the hollowing out of the national scale and the filling in of the regional scale. It is argued however that the dualism between a hollowing-out state and a filling-in region manifests some discrepancies between this framework and the transformationalist perspective that takes seriously issues of political agency and the role of empirical research in unveiling the extent to which one form of state restructuring represents 'devolution'.

These issues are considered in the next chapter in relation to a re-formulation of the state space approach capable of providing a more 'flexible' multi-scalar analytical framework through which to develop an empirically rich, theoretically based, approach for advancing knowledge of new state spaces.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has unpacked the theoretical underpinnings of this study focusing on attempts to amend the weaknesses of 'orthodox' new regionalist interpretations of the 'rise of the region'. This focus could underline a continuous trajectory of development of the new regionalism attuned to the observation that

the discipline is replete with attempts to undermine, reject and abandon the concept [of the region] altogether. Yet time and again the 'region' reasserts itself and each time the way we write about the 'region' changes so that we no longer think of it as a fixed geographic scale but more as a relational and political construct

(Jonas, 2006, p. 402).

The critical debate that has emerged around some of the assumptions of 'orthodox' new regionalism stimulated a new generation of theorists' attempts to provide further insights into the 'rise of the region'. In contrast with most new regionalist interpretations this new body of research stated that the rise of the region is not necessarily at the expense of the nation state but represents a 'spatial selectivity' of the state. However, it was emphasised how, by shifting the focus of attention well beyond the geography of the region onto the wider reconfiguration of the state in a context of increased globalisation, the risk became one of losing sight of the region. Scholars have responded to this challenge and attempted to provide increasingly rich and dynamic understandings of central-local relations. This chapter has emphasised the significance of the advances encapsulated in Brenner's spatialised SRA for consolidating political economy of scale perspectives. In particular, the way this approach captures the temporal dimension of state rescaling has assisted in further addressing the charges of



reification and throws into relief how relational accounts that tend to characterise state space as always fluid and open might have pushed the pendulum too far in the effort to move beyond traditional characterisations of space as bounded and static. If the SRA has strengthened political economic perspectives on state restructuring it does not mean that this approach is immune from criticism. Notably, such advances are undermined by the systematic under-evaluation of the importance of the link between conceptualisation and concrete forms of enquiry. This acknowledgement shapes this study's choice to hold on to the strengths of this perspective while also seeking to expand its focus through the use of additional notions capable of grounding abstract modelling in actual spaces, initiatives and institutions. The next chapter develops this critique and proposes a regional research framework that can be employed for advancing knowledge of new regional governance spaces.

# 3. Towards a Concrete 'Second Wave' of Regionalist Research

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...this 'new regionalism' is not just about trying to explain the production of a particular scale of economic and social life but also represents a new way of approaching 'regions' theoretically as strategic sites in the geography of capitalism after Fordism.

(Jonas, 2006 p. 402)

## 1. Introduction

One of the key advantages of the state space approach compared to relational perspectives is its emphasis on the historical dimension of state spatial processes. However while conceiving state rescaling in the terms of a "conflictual layering process" (Brenner 2009, p.134) raises critical issues of agency, these tend to be underplayed in accounts that remain focused on broad processes at the expenses of the complex politics through which regional spaces are formed. Therefore the state space approach provides only the beginning of a framework for exploring the emergence of new regional spaces as the outcome of political processes in which the state is centrally implicated. An enriched conceptual vocabulary is needed through which the 'forces acting in and through the state', or the spatialised social forces that shape particular regional spaces, key elements of the SRA, can be better conceptualised and analysed. These considerations drive this chapter's engagement with Cox's (1998; Cox and Mair, 1991) work on the 'politics of scale' and Liepietz's (1994) complementary insights on 'regional armatures' or coalitions. These additional notions in particular can be employed to enrich accounts of how regions were differently embedded in the Fordist and Post-Fordist political economy through a more developed sense of how regions often perform as actors in the context of processes of state rescaling. This does not mean that it is the region itself that acts, in the way some new regionalist accounts seems to imply,

but that territorially sensitive (or 'place dependent') actors endeavour to mobilise a 'regional interest', often one that mobilises sectional interests, but 'in the name of the region as a whole' (Cox, 1998; Liepietz, 1994). When there is an embedded hegemonic social bloc or a coalition of elite groups acting in the name of a region we can say that we are in the presence of a 'space for itself' with the capacity to act. Although in the past these notions have been employed largely in relation to attempts of local actors to obtain resources and power from higher institutional levels, they include also the attempts of national actors to manipulate 'lower' scales.

This chapter discusses the development of this more rich formulation of the state space approach and its adaptability a truly multi-scalar framework for exploring the restructuring of sub-national economic governance in England as a serious political question. It does by analysing the re-making of political agency, its geography and the multiple ways in which state spatial strategies are mobilised and attempts to re-work the state spatial-institutional architecture.

## **2. State Space, Political Agency and the Region**

This section reassesses the strengths and weaknesses of Brenner's formulation of state space and emphasises and discusses its adaptability as a framework for theorising and exploring the shaping of particular regional spaces. In making the case for the need for a new theoretical synthesis it reviews the terms of a regional debate that has proceeded in a disconnected and fragmented manner undermining a full understanding of the institutionalisation of regions in England and beyond.

### *2.1 The limits to State Space*

As said in Chapter 2, Brenner's spatialised SRA encases the institutions traditionally seen as propelling the 'rise of the region' in a broader political

economic analysis of the increased spatial targeting of regions by state interventions in the economy or society and/or the regionalisation of state form. The rescaling of state strategies and institutional capacity represents here a deliberate attempt on the part of the nation state to regulate dynamics of contemporary capitalist development; crucially, this is never a neutral matter. Overall this approach provides the beginning of a framework for re-conceptualising the 'rise of the region' not just as of a techno-economic process but as one which results from political strategies and in which the state is centrally implicated. From the viewpoint of this study one of the advantages of this approach with respect to relational perspectives on the institutionalisation of regions is its sensitivity to the question of time. As noted by Jones (2009), relational accounts appear to characterise state space as something of a 'blank slate' prior to its production by actor-networks. The impulse to portray space as 'always emergent' and fluid is associated with a 'flat' sense of time that necessarily cuts out from consideration the potential influences and effects from the previous occupation of state space. The question of time-space seems to receive a more satisfactory treatment where the state spatial structures at any given moment in time are seen as the layered spatial-institutional condensation of relations of power between various economic and socio-political actors that results from previous struggle (Brenner, 2004; Peck, 1998). This makes such structures 'strategically selective', that is, not structurally pre-determined, but more favourable towards particular strategies, projects and subjects than other. If, on the basis of this, the stance in this study is one that rejects the relational critique of reification it is also recognised that it is important not to stop here as many from a political economic perspective have tended to do. Indeed, rejecting this critique should not distract from the need to give more serious consideration to the way more agency-centred accounts of state spatial dynamics highlight crucial weaknesses of the state space approach specifically as a framework for theorising and exploring the 'shaping' of particular regional spaces. For example, it remains somewhat unclear the extent to which the approach is actually concerned with opening up the theorised 'layering processes' and engage with the complex politics through which these take place and, in this way, being

able to effectively delineate the contradictions and ambiguities of state restructuring as a 'trial and error' process. The state space approach has concerned itself with broad processes and the re-organisation of institutions rather than with the activation of the latter through the utilisation of available capacity and resources. In this respect the approach could benefit from a reordering of its focus, assigning greater conceptual and analytical centrality to the forces 'acting in and through the state' or, in relation to state space, the spatialised forces shaping particular places.

Another key issue, closely related to this, regards the adaptability for use beyond simple perspectives set on the orchestration and negotiation of competencies between the state and the region and the extent to which this approach has effectively delivered on its stated aim of exploring changing interrelationships among various scales effectively examining a range of scales at once (rather than focusing on a single scale alone) (Brenner, 2001).

The state space approach appears to offer a starting point for theorising and exploring processes of space formation that are multi-dimensional in nature and characterised by the interaction between emergent spatial strategies and existing scalar arrangements. Key concerns remain however and a reasonable amount of further development is required in order to gain sufficient utility as a robust theoretical and analytical framework.

### 2.2. Filling the gaps in the regional debate

There is a large body of literature available on the institutionalisation of the English regions under the New Labour Government. For long this regional debate has proceeded along separate axes that seemed as not meeting in any meaningful dialogue (abstract vs. empiricist and scalar vs. networked: see Table 1).

The majority of discussions on the crisis of the region highlighted by the 2004 referendum and the emergent solution in the form of networked city-regional

governance, tended to reflect largely 'empiricist' concerns in the form of policy centred discussions (Sandford, 2005; Hardill et al. 2006; SURF, 2003, 2004; Parkinson et al., 2006). This policy-oriented strand of work remained concerned almost exclusively with "superficial questions" (Lord, 2009, p.81) refraining in particular from questioning the basic belief that a reconfiguration of policy delivery apparatuses around the city-region was conducive the economic growth.

**Table 1: The Regional Debate**

	<b>'Concrete'</b>	<b>'Abstract'</b>
<b>Scalar/territorial</b>	'First wave' or 'orthodox' new regionalism (i.e. Scott, 1998; Cook and Morgan, 1998);	Political economy of state rescaling (i.e. Brenner, 1998; Jessop, 1999)
	'Thin' policy oriented regional research (i.e. Parkinson et al., 2006)	
<b>Networked</b>	Relational regional research (i.e. Allen and Cochrane, 2007)	
<b>Scalar/territorial and Networked</b>	'Concrete' second wave regionalism (i.e. Gualini, 2006; Jonas, 2006; Harrison, 2008)	'Second wave' regionalism (i.e. Brenner, 2004; MacLeod and Jones, 2004).

The requirement for greater conceptual depth was incorporated in another strand of regional research that has taken English regionalism as an empirical reference point to emphasise the continued significance of the role of the national state in underpinning regional and city-regional competitiveness strategies, and particularly their dynamics and future trajectories (Harrison, 2006; Hudson, 2005, 2006; Lovering, 1999). In the same way in which 'thin' approaches had previously shifted the focus too far in the direction of regions, these accounts now shifted it

too far in the direction of the state. In this context, Jones and MacLeod's (2004) research on the South West region appeared to be particularly important in relation to the wider endeavour to reinsert the geography of regions at the centre of the concerns of critical regional studies. Through the distinction between political 'spaces of regionalism' and economic 'regional spaces', these scholars convincingly argued for the importance of conceiving regions as political-economic as well as socio-cultural constructions. However this contribution appears also as emblematic of the limitations of a developing 'second wave' new regionalist research. In particular, it highlights a missed opportunity for these scholars to develop and utilise the tools developed elsewhere in their work (MacLeod, 1999; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999) for exploring how, in practice, political, cultural and the economic factors combine in the multi-dimensional institutionalisation of regions.

Harrison (2007, 2008, 2012) has recently contributed to develop empirically the work of MacLeod through a series of articles focusing on the emergence and evolution of regionalism and city-regionalism in England. For example, in one of these articles Harrison (2008) set to integrate accounts of 'centrally orchestrated regionalism' exploring the regionally specific struggles that developed around emergent regional institutions in the North West region. However also this attempt at developing second wave regionalist research remains somewhat unconvincing as, for example, regional analysis seems to remain over preoccupied with the relation between the state and the region at the expenses of a deeper engagement with the relation between the latter and the inherited path dependencies and emergent strategies at sub-regional and local level.

In the light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the momentum behind relational accounts of regionalisation has remained strong. A decade on from their pioneering study of South East England (with Massey), Allen and Cochrane's (2007) contribution seems to epitomise this as they renewed their longstanding interest with the South East region to further develop their argument. As testified by the reference to the 'politics of scale' (p.1171-72), although critical of scalar-territorial approaches for restricting the analysis within a rigid hierarchical

framework, in this account, national-local relations are prevalent with respect to 'horizontal' linkages with actors in other local spaces. Proceeding from a relational perspective critical of the political economy of scale, this research recognises that governance practices are focused upon the region though they entail the mobilisation of wider networks.

There is a significant area of overlap between the two perspectives above in relation in particular to a shared concern with the construction of spatial scales and how wider social relations and networks shape these.

From the perspective of this study, one that, as explained in the introduction, is oriented towards a more 'open' political economy of scale, the focus on the critique of reification, or rather its rejection, seems to have overshadowed the opportunities for a more serious engagement with some of insights from more agency oriented accounts and ultimately for the advancement of knowledge of new regional state spaces.

Rather than examining the multidimensional institutionalisation of the region through a single scalar lens (and then build the steering role of the state), like relational scholars do, it is argued that what is needed is a more developed, 'concrete' understanding of 'how' functions and powers are attacked, defended, institutionalised, up-scaled and down-scaled in the course of political economic struggle (Peck, 2001).

### *2.3 Spaces of dependence/engagement, territorial coalitions and 'spatial imaginaries'*

As indicated in section 2.1, accounts from a political economic perspective have been concerned mostly with broad strategies and the organisation of institutions rather than with the 'dynamism' of the latter or how the available capacity and resources are utilised. In this respect the approach could benefit from a reordering of its focus, so as to assign effective conceptual and analytical centrality to the forces 'acting in and through the state'. In this context, the work of Kevin Cox (1998; Cox and Mair, 1998) on the 'politics of scale' can be employed for analysing



the geographical dimension of this or the spatially constituted social forces that shape and mould particular state spaces. For Cox (1998), territorially articulated coalitions of interests are for the realisation of their interests dependent on localised social relations for which there are no easy possibilities for substitution elsewhere. In order to secure the re-production of these “spaces of dependence” they construct networks of associations with other centres of social power, which Cox calls “spaces of engagement”. Whereas the term ‘space of dependence’ seems to refer thus to the structural moment relating to the role of forces located elsewhere, ‘space of engagement’ refers to the strategic moment of the organisation of interest groups in space.

In order to fully escape spatial fetishism it is important to excavate the underpinning political projects emphasising that is not regions or localities themselves that ‘act’ but particular social forces claiming to act in the name of particular local or regional areas: here the representative dimension of space or the role of ‘spatial imaginaries’ is key (MacLeod, 1999). In this respect, Lipietz’s (1994) notion of ‘regional armatures’ or coalitions can provide important conceptual insights. It emphasises the actions of regional elites in regulating conflictual social relations through the mobilisation of distinctive political and ideological apparatuses. In some cases the role of these apparatuses are crucial for reproducing the leadership of a particular coalition of elite groups or, in Gramscian terms, “hegemonic social bloc”. The activities of the latter, Lipietz argues, are instrumental in the transformation of a ‘space in itself’, defined by the social relations associated with specific forms of production, into a ‘space for itself’, one with the capacity to intervene in processes of economic and social change.

As noted in the preceding section, the reference to a ‘politics of scale’ was utilised by Allen and Cochrane (2007) to show how ostensibly local actors participated in a range of networks. MacLeod (1999) employed the same notion for analysing the construction of Euro-regional partnerships in relation to the endeavour of local political leaders to liaison with EU institutions for securing funds for their area. Although to date it has been mostly concerned with ‘upward’ movements of local actors, the constitution of a politics of a ‘local form’, as stressed by MacKinnon

(2010), the broad concept of 'politics of scale' naturally comprehends the national and super-national forces seeking to manipulate 'lower' scales.

In this way, rather than emerging pre-formed as the outcome of abstract processes as often implied in accounts of state space, the region can be seen as an object of struggle involving actors at different spatial scales.

### **3. Towards a multi-scalar and multi-dimensional approach: a 'concrete' second wave regional research**

Recent work from regional and urban researchers has informed increasingly 'pluralistic' understanding of new state spaces, it remains however still unconvincing as it does not engage thoroughly with the multiple manifestations of a 'politics of scale'. In conveying a general view of government as 'generator' and local or regional actors as 'recipients' of strategies, state rescaling research has yet to analyse with a sufficient level of depth the circumstances in which state rescaling occurs. The discussion below develops a set of dimensions that together can provide a genuinely framework for developing empirically rich, theoretically driven accounts of new regional spaces through which advance knowledge of state space. These dimensions are derived from the Brenner's spatialised SRA, the notion of a 'politics of scale' and the complimentary ideas on territorial coalitions and spatial imaginaries.

#### *3.1 Analysing the construction of new regional state spaces*

Accounts of how regions are differently embedded in the scalar configuration of the Fordist and Post-Fordist political-economy, and the urban and regional arena that has become a strategic site for economic governance, can profit from a greater historical appreciation of regions as actors in processes of state restructuring. This does not mean that regions themselves can act as actors as some new regionalist accounts do. Territorially sensitive (or place dependent)

actors might 'act in the name of' certain regionally based and 'imagined community' of interests (Cox, 1998; Liepietz, 1994). Whenever there is a regionally embedded coalition acting in the name of a region, we are in the presence of a 'space for itself', one with the institutional capacity to engage in particular projects such as one of competitiveness.

In contrast with the idea, central to much theorizing on state space, that regions emanate from projects first developed at National state level and subsequently implemented regionally or locally, local and regional actors seek to manipulate the environment in which they operate. They are capable of constructing a political vision for the area in which they operate as an imagined community of sorts. If it might be wrong to assume that national policies determine local and regional outcomes, it is equally simplistic to assume that they simply emerge from struggles at these levels and processes of 'contagion' (Sayer, 1989). The argument developed below is that central state may be presented with instances articulated in preceding local and regional struggles and tries to manipulate their outcomes through strategic intervention.

It continues to be important to articulate the role of the state in relation to non-national institutional frameworks as it 'orchestrates' some of the conditions that underpin the emergence and viability of certain spatial coalitions and visions. Not only a location but also a vehicle for political strategy, the institutional infrastructure of the state can be manipulated by actors at lower spatial scales attempting to increase their power and influence on the decisions of the state. The institutional infrastructure of the state provides institutionalised power positions or 'capacity to act' in relation to the shaping of the regional process. Even often formulated in state centric terms, zooming on national policies rather than the forces that mobilise these, notions of strategic and spatial selectivity of the state provide key insights into the asymmetric (inter) dependencies underpinning the interactions between national and sub-national actors. These interdependencies define how, at a particular moment in time, the scalar-institutional architecture of the state affects the relative power position of social forces and spatially defined projects.

Localities or regions, or the coalitions that seek to represent them, may be able to get the ear and cooperation of central actors when they are in some sense important for them. Space of engagement may then be forged, which enables these coalitions to project their localities beyond their administrative boundaries, effectively 'jumping scale'. Ways in which increased importance may be gained include, for example: firstly, economic reasons, when some regions and cities are of importance for the economic strategy of the nation state; secondly, political reasons, where local actors have relatively close ties to national policy makers and thus may be better able to draw attention to the perceived needs of their areas; and thirdly, electoral concerns, where regions or localities represent a significant part of the electoral basis and the voting behaviour is seen as depending on national policies; politicians and civil servants will be more likely to attend to the issues of those areas.

Local and regional actors are thus able to transcend spatial boundaries as this politics of scale involves the mobilisation of networks and alliances that link them to more distant actors. However, underpinning this is a dependence on particular institutional forms, vehicles for mobilising resources and power, which curtails strategies somewhat.

This frames a more dynamic understanding of centre-local relationships where different degrees of inter-dependencies define the level of interaction and collaboration between the centre and localities and regions.

Let's consider these interactions from the viewpoint of non-central actors first. As said above, these have the capacity to develop political visions for the areas in which they operate and which they may seek to manipulate. In addition to this, it is important to stress that competing visions may emerge. These might reflect interests rooted in different territorial coalitions as well as nested across wider extra-territorial allegiances.

In this respect, the strategies of national actors will be thus subject to a level of pressure from 'below' these as well by 'sideways' pressures. The latter include the pressure to compete on a global stage but also, perhaps even more critically, those deriving from tensions between different departments, political parties and

undercurrents as each of these forces compete with others for influence or legitimacy. The state's 'spatial selectivity' is the outcome of pressures on National policy makers, the gains they expect and the extent of power available to them, all of which relates to the particular 'power geometries' within the particular spatial-temporal context.

Finally, even as a particular spatial vision is 'selected' and translated in a strategy pursued by significant social forces, it can always be modified or subverted. Here there is the need to consider the orientation of existing institutional arrangements and the strategies that might be enacted by competing coalitions as legitimised by previous rounds of state reforms.

The framework above has the advantage of pushing the focus beyond the agency of the nation state on to those scales where regulatory institutions and mechanisms are implemented. It has done so in order to decline the suggestion that the state space approach is limited by a view of regional or local governance frameworks as passive receivers in relation to wider regulatory tendencies. This does not mean denying that in particular instances this may happen, scalar initiatives can be developed directly or in isolation by the central state. However there are at least two key reasons for advocating for a genuine multi-scalar approach that places greater emphasis also on political agency at local and regional.

First, the failures of state policy that are addressed through new state spatial strategies tend to be 'felt', almost by definition, in more local contexts at a previous moment in time. The forces that operate in these contexts are those to first experience problems associated with political and economic dislocation and develop distinctive understandings of these problems. As local actors attempt to build coalitions, both horizontally and vertically (in the ways examined above), in order to develop their influence, gradually, issues specific to particular regional and local contexts can translate into more generalised problems that call for further policy intervention.

A second reason concerns the recognition that the state cannot 'fix it' or, as noted by Hudson (2000) some ten years ago, a growing disjunction that now exists between the intentions and outcomes of state intervention. Previous rounds of rescaling and seepages of power have licensed multiple sub-national forces and scales of decision-making. The task of the central state is to 'select' and to support the strategies of those forces that are expected to operate in line with central actors' perceived interests. Central actors can manipulate and capitalise on these relations they have increasingly less opportunity to simply impose their plans upon others scales and actors.

The dimensions discussed above do not intend to add up to a simple recipe for case studies, the intent is, more loosely, to apply this framework and show the general usefulness of the approach, especially where interactions between actors at different scalar levels are concerned.

## **Conclusion**

Starting point for this chapter was the observation that the state space approach provides only the beginning of a framework for re-conceptualising the 'rise of the region' not just as of a techno-economic process but one which results from political strategies and in which the state is centrally implicated. One of the key advantages of this approach with respect to relational accounts of state spatial processes regards its more satisfactory treatment of the historical dimension of the latter. While this raises fundamental issues of agency however these have been systematically overlooked so that it remains unclear the extent to which the approach is effectively concerned with the circumstances in which particular spatialities are produced.

If more recent work, in particular from regional and urban researchers, has informed increasingly 'pluralistic' understanding of new regional spaces, it remains unconvincing as it generally failed to engage thoroughly with multiple manifestations of a 'politics of scale'.

The chapter has proposed the development of a new synthesis as a contribution to the theoretical understanding of the state space.

Jessop's (1990) SRA provides a meta-theoretical framework that emphasises the dynamic interplay between state structures and the strategies of social forces to advance their interest in a particular spatial-temporal conjuncture. Brenner (2004) effectively spatialises the SRA through the distinction between state spatial strategies and state spatial projects; new state spaces emerge from a process of 'institutional layering' where emergent state spatial strategies interact with existing arrangements. Further insights on the spatialised social forces shaping particular regional spaces can be gained through notions of a 'politics of scale' (Cox, 1998), 'regional armatures' or coalitions (Lipietz, 1994) and related ideas of 'spatial imaginaries' (MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999).

The significance of this enriched formulation as a framework for analysing the multi-dimensional institutionalisation of regions relies in particular on its adaptability beyond the simple focus on a given state project and its implementation; including increased awareness of strategies from above, below and across networks.

The chapter has developed a set of dimension that together can inspire a multi-scalar, multi-dimensional regional research capable of producing empirically rich, theoretically driven, accounts through which advance knowledge of state space.

First, policy failures which trigger new state spatial strategies manifest first in local and regional contexts and are given meanings therein; local and regional actors attempt to build coalitions, both horizontally and vertically in order to develop their influence. Gradually issues specific to local contexts translate into more generalised problems that require policy intervention.

Second, in contrast to state space accounts where the motivations of the groups that control the state seem to have unified scalar goal, the state can be seen as a coalition of various regionally-based groups with interests that produce different, at times competing 'spatial imaginaries' of the region. Competing visions reflect a combination of the respective interests of the coalitions of forces involved and the broader ideology reflected in wider cross-territorial alliances.

Third, state intervention selects both partners and particular 'spatial imaginaries'. This 'selectivity' is the outcome of pressures put on National policy makers, the gains they expect and the extent of the means available to them, all of which relates to 'power geometries' in a particular spatio-temporal context.

Finally thus, even as a particular spatial imaginary is 'selected' and developed in a strategy pursued by significant social forces there is no guarantee that it will become stabilised in new institutional arrangements.



# 4. New Labour and a New Regional Policy for England

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## 1. Introduction

The economic and democratic deficits that characterised the regional landscape in England (Tomaney, 2000) provided a strong rationale for the Labour party, first in opposition, and later in Government, to engage with new regionalist claims that an economic dividend could be harnessed from greater devolution of decision-making and implementation around the regional and local levels. Established in 1999, RDAs established by the Labour Government represented the centre piece of a new regional policy for England. The first part of the chapter focuses on the debate that took place around the extent of the functions and powers that were provided to the new Agencies and explores the different ideologies that underpinned this debate. It highlights in particular the role that 'regional competitiveness' and the related discourse that 'every region can be a winner' play in promoting a new model of regional governance. The events that surrounded the development of the proposal submitted to the North East electorate in the 2004 referendum allow to reflect further on the role of the state; in particular not only in terms of its continued influence on the developmental trajectory of the regions but also of its impact on the outcome on the process of regionalisation.

A consequence of the demise of the plan for an elected regional tier was that emphasis shifted on partnership working, inter-institutional and public-private cooperation, as a way to find agreement and managing the complexities involved in developing multiple strategies. Given their institutional constraints, the Agencies were contingent on these mechanisms and in all regions extensive links were established with the sub-regional partnerships (Pearce and Ayeres, 2009). Although the various actors might share a commitment to collaborate across institutional boundaries, they were also influenced by different agendas. These

interdependencies are considered examining the relationship between RDAs and sub-regional partnerships. Finally, the likely impact of emergent state intervention through the 2007 SNR (HM Treasury et al., 2007) on regional/sub-regional relationships is considered.

## **2. The establishment of RDAs and Regional Assemblies in the English regions**

This section examines the circumstances in which RDAs were established in the English regions in 1997. It examines the debate that has taken place around the extent of responsibilities assigned to the new agencies and highlights the distinct ideologies underpinning this debate. Particular attention is placed on the mobilisation of a discourse of 'regional competitiveness' and the gap between the latter and the reality on the ground. In this gap the strategic role played by the state is located.

Although RDAs are provided with even increasing resources, such resources were tied to strict government's targets. The circumstances around the development of a proposal for elected Regional Assemblies to submit to the North East electorate can shed further light on the extent to which 'state orchestration' was prominent in England.

### **2.1. The establishment of RDAs**

The new regional agenda in England emerged as a complex synthesis of many different determinants (Jones and MacLeod, 1999) but four elements can be isolated as important drivers. The emergence of RDAs certainly reflected the pervasiveness of the contentious arguments that that traditional interventionist regional policy was no longer adequate to the requirements of a globalised and liberalised economy. Replicating the competitive circumstances in a narrow set of vibrant thriving 'exemplar' regions in the context of the sluggish economies of the

English peripheral regions, it was asserted, could best be effected by developing new regionally based institutions (Harding et al, 1996; Morgan, 1997). This voguish argument was juxtaposed with a longstanding concern with regional disparities. The establishment of regional agencies, it was argued, would provide both a means of bolstering economic development and allowing regions of England's north to compete more effectively in the global economy. Simultaneously, these agencies would help offset interregional socioeconomic disparities (Labour Party, 1995).

Another key driver was a desire to align the UK to the call for a 'Europe of the regions' that in the early 90s had reached its zenith<sup>4</sup>. On a more pragmatic level, national policy makers acknowledged the need to develop significant regional institutional capacity for the design and delivery of Single Programming Documents to secure European Structural Funds (Musson et al. 2005).

The period from the early 1990s also saw attempts by the then Government to promote new regional institutional structures, to develop a stronger regional dimension to National policies, and to encourage greater institutional collaboration on a regional basis. After several years during which spatial policy and planning were organised almost exclusively around narrowly drawn intra-conurbation and sub-regional areas, the early to the mid-1990s saw a cautious and partial rediscovery of the regional question. In this context the establishment of 'Government Offices' in 1994 and comprehensive coverage of Regional Planning Guidance for the English standard regions were the most significant innovations. The developing new regionalist orthodoxy found expression also through the development of some forms of bottom-up regionally based economic development partnerships and indirectly elected associations of local politicians, in many cases as precursors to the later establishment of RDAs and Regional Chambers. This

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<sup>4</sup> In this context, regionally allocated structural funds were distributed amongst under developed and declining regions while a series of community initiatives (INTERREG IIc and TERRA) encouraged regional partnership within and across EU member states. On-going efforts were also carried out to develop a European Spatial Perspective with the aim of guiding future EU plans and policies to address spatial inequalities and boost competitiveness (European Commission, 1991, 1994).

somewhat tentative resurgence of regionalism acquired more impetus under the first Blair Government.

With regards to the policy debates internal to the Labour Party, a distinction soon emerged between the constitutional issues relative to English devolution and the economic issues relative to the inadequacies of traditional regional policy (Harding et al. 1999). When committed regionalist John Prescott first championed the cause of English regionalism during the 1980s, the region was still perceived as the most appropriate level for interventionist policies, with the question of democratic accountability coming as something of an afterthought. Throughout subsequent debates, the distinction between economic and democratic deficits persisted with the key concern being one of how best to 'bridge the gap' between the institutional reforms required to tackle them (Harding et al., 1999). In particular, while addressing the economic deficit via the establishment of RDAs gained wide support, addressing the democratic deficit via a process of full regional devolution remained a well-documented source of internal conflict within the Labour Party (Tomaney and Hetherington, 2006).

Animated by the new intellectual climate a new regional policy coalition formed in the early 90s around the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. The vehicle for drafting Labour's new regional policy was the Regional Policy Commission formed in 1996 and chaired by Bruce Millan, at the time influential former EU commissioner of regional policy. The 'Millan Commission' proposed three main institutional innovations: first, that RDAs should be in charge of English regional policy; second, that RDAs should be created in all the English Regions and third, that indirectly elected regional chambers should be created to steer the development agencies and make them accountable to the region (Regional Policy Commission 1996). These three recommendations formed the basis of Labour's legislative agenda when it came into office in 1997.

If the Regional Policy Commission was the instrument for the delineating the regional policy vision of the Labour party in opposition, it was the team behind the Department for the Environment Transport and Regions (DETR) that took charge of delivering the legislative agenda in Government.

The White Paper, 'Building Partnership for Prosperity', published in December 1997 confirmed the establishment of "new structures and opportunities" in and through which the English regions could "punch their weight in the global market place" (DETR, 1997, p. 1). Formally launched in 1999, the objectives of the RDAs were fivefold: first, to promote regional economic development and regeneration; second, to advance business investment, efficiency and competitiveness; third, to increase employment levels; fourth, to assist with the development of 'relevant' skills and fifth, to encourage sustainable forms of development.

Provided with a budget of 750 million RDAs were granted a range of powers to meet these objectives, the majority of which came from existing government programmes and agencies; key among these was the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund, responsibility for the management of which was assumed from the GOs. Furthermore, powers and resources for assisting in land assembly and the development of commercial and industrial premises were acquired from the regional offices of English Partnership and resources for the regeneration of rural areas were inherited from the Rural Development Commission.

Many commentators noted that the White Paper reflected a narrow conception of the RDAs as strategic bodies with limited funds, exercising control and influence over a limited range of areas (Deas and Ward, 1999); their work was restricted to physical regeneration, land development, business support and advice (in collaboration with Business Links) and the attraction of inward investment (plausibly in collaboration with existing regional development organisations).

The 1998 Regional Development Agencies Act confirmed that strategy building and steering the work of sub regional implementers through the development of a RES was to become central to the role RDAs role. This would involve each RDA preparing a regional economic strategy (RES) required to support and enhance national policies, while addressing the needs of the region (DETR, 1999). To ensure that the process delivered RES that reflected region-wide support, partnership working was a further requirement. RDAs were instructed to proceed through dialogue and to foster regional partnership and co-operation. The Statutory Guidance issues in 1999 stressed that the fundamental purpose of the

RES was to “improve economic performance and enhance the region’s competitiveness” (DETR, 1999, p.12).

A preliminary observation that can be made in relation to the process of definition of the RDAs programme and its implementation is that while earlier initiatives for regional cooperation involved a variety of issues (ranging from environmental policy to transport policies), RDAs were primarily established to promote economic growth and to increase regional competitiveness. Competitiveness, not social exclusion or more broadly defined economic development, was seen as the central element of RDAs strategies. This predominant business logic permeates the structure of the RDAs through the requirement that they would be led by small business dominated Boards made up of unelected local dignitaries appointed by the Secretary of State.

The subject of severe criticism on the part of numerous commentators, in academic literature (Gibbs, 1998; Morgan, 2001), this narrow focus inscribed in the RDA’s aims and structure, reflected New Labour’s wider belief that the prioritisation of the pursuit of competitiveness goals is seen as in no way as conflicting with the pursuit of social justice and environmental goals<sup>5</sup>.

Second, it is not difficult to recognize the infusion of New Regionalist ethos into the new regional development structures. One can point to the influence of endogenous growth theory and to the emphasis on indirect measures to boost local economic competitiveness like programmes to stimulate innovation and learning within firms, and to upgrade the infrastructure for training, education and communication (DTI,1998a; 1998b; 2001). RDAs have been asked to plan for clusters and innovation systems (DTI, 1998a; 1998b).

It is important to notice also how the discourse that informed the set up of the RDAs reflected more than just a mere interest for co-location, through references to clusters, drawing heavily on the more sophisticated approaches of the ‘institutional turn’ and the ‘network paradigm’ (Lovering, 1999). Increased

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<sup>5</sup> In the words of Gordon Brown “in a modern, global economy, the policies necessary to tackle growing inequality and social dislocation are the very same which are necessary to produce a dynamic and competitive economy”(Brown, 1994, p. 17 cited in Webb and Collins, 2000).

competitiveness was presented as being the result not only of co-location but also of tacit knowledge, collaboration, knowledge sharing, trust relations (DTI, 1998). The emphasis on regionally specific horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation (Jones and MacLeod, 2001) was echoed in the discourses of democratic renewal of some Labour pro-devolution politicians (Caborn, 2000).

In fact, the objectives and functions of RDAs were closely prescribed by Central Government

and the agencies are ultimately accountable to Ministers through boards that draw their social base primarily from the business sector. Considering these constitutional and representational limitations the potential for RDAs to nurture a form of democratic renewal and associative democracy (Hirst, 1997) appears questionable or, highly dependent on the assumption that regional assemblies would be able to shape the material, representational and symbolic form of the RDA.

Assemblies were nominated bodies including representatives of local government, business, trades unions, higher education, faith and minority ethnic communities. They were expected to provide a resemblance of regional democracy in advance of elected regional bodies and were responsible for scrutinising the activities of the RDAs and assisting in regional strategy coordination.

The discourse of 'regional competitiveness' (Bristow, 2010) played an important role in the regional debate and in the transformation of UK regional policy from Keynesian welfare policy concerned with issues of territorial justice to Schumpeterian development tool to enhance the UK's low productivity levels.

### 2.3 'All regions can be winners'

Many have exposed the fuzziness of the concept of 'regional competitiveness' (Krugman, 1996; Martin and Sunley, 2003; Bristow, 2010). The case of the RDAs provides a particularly clear example of how 'regional competitiveness' worked as an 'enabling myth' (Hudson, 2005), a powerful discourse which misrepresents

reality and yet attains belief. Specifically, it is argued, such 'myth' has served the important purpose of recasting the RDA programme as an innovative policy tool in its own right rather than as the mere first strand of the Government's proposal for regional devolution (Webb and Collins, 2005).

Labour's new regional policy framework was delineated in a series of reports carrying the signature of the Treasury (2001; 2003a,b, 2004). The crux of this framework is that gaps in regional income levels (as measured by GDP per capita) should be explained by the gaps in 'productivity' (as measured by GDP per employee). The drivers of productivity then identified are five: skills, investment, innovation, enterprise and competition. This emergent micro-economic, supply-side focus drove a re-conceptualisation where lagging regional economic performance, rather than from deficits in the demand as conceived in the traditional Keynesian approach (Parsons, 1988), was seen as arising from inefficiencies, rigidities, and inflexibilities characterising the supply-side of a region's economy. These weaknesses, in turn, prevent the region's firms, industries and workers from responding to the changing market conditions of a globalised knowledge economy (DTI, 2001b). On the basis of the new terms of interpretation of the 'regional problem', the five drivers' framework inevitably subverts the terms of the proposed 'solutions'. The indigenous nature of the causes of a region's lagging competitive performance calls for policies directed at improving a region's supply-side features and capabilities. Such upgrading of the local milieu for business is expected to couple the competitiveness of firms to the competitiveness of regions, through local interdependencies and economies of agglomeration (DTI, 2001).

The intellectual bias of the economists within the Treasury can be traced in the a-spatial character of an analysis where a framework used to explain the lower levels of growth of the UK's economy as a whole compared to the EU average was un-problematically recast at the regional and local level. In other words, there is nothing inherently 'regional' in this analysis. The regional dimension derives mostly from the fascination within the Treasury, and other sectors of Government, with the propositions of Porter (2003) and his theory on clusters and



competitiveness. This, as observed by Martin (2005), was clear in particular in the discussions on the drivers and indicators of regional competitiveness that were regularly published by the DTI (BERR later) where the approach was one that focused on the regional variations for each of the drivers in isolation (rather than on variations in their interactions). This approach showed no consideration for the regionally specific kind of interactions taking place in the supply-side architecture of the regional economy and, more in general, the underlying region-specific characteristics that produce, and are produced by, its specific pattern of economic of activity and specialisation.

Therefore, government reformulated regional policy in terms of a discourse of 'regional competitiveness' which, to be effective, entails the delivery of 'uniqueness scripts' (Lagendijk and Cornford, 2000) calibrated towards the regions' specific strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, such 'scripts' have been transmitted by the centre through the use of various technologies (Hudson, 2005) such as RDA competitiveness league tables, targets and milestones set by Central Government constitute key technologies enabling DTI and the HM Treasury to steer the activities of regional agencies and ensure they deliver the set national policy objectives.

Corollary to the lack of consideration for the nature and significance of regional contingencies is that in the Government regional policy framework the region is conceived as the sum of the firms that happen to be located there. The focus on firms within the region prescribes also relatively narrow policy route to development. A frequent critique levelled at RDAs was that they tended to prioritize a rather narrow private sector orientated agendas at the expense of broader regeneration initiatives (Niven, 2004).

The link between firms' competitiveness and regional prosperity is one that is also highly contingent on the specific industrial structure of a region. Productivity as measured by GDP per worker, will necessarily be higher in those regions that have the higher concentration of capital-intensive industries with high value added per head (Fothergill, 2005).

However, the reconstruction of the regional problem above is based on the assumption that regions compete on a level playing field, in other words that 'all regions can be winners'.

If the Treasury conceded that "a region industry mix plays some role in explaining individual regions and localities' economic problem" it also specified how "on the whole it does not critically constrain a region's growth potential" (HM Treasury, 2001, p.21). While not rejecting the existence of regional disparities, Government's approach underplayed a reality in which of joblessness was concentrated in some large part of the country in favour of a focus on intra-regional disparities (HM Treasury, 2002b).

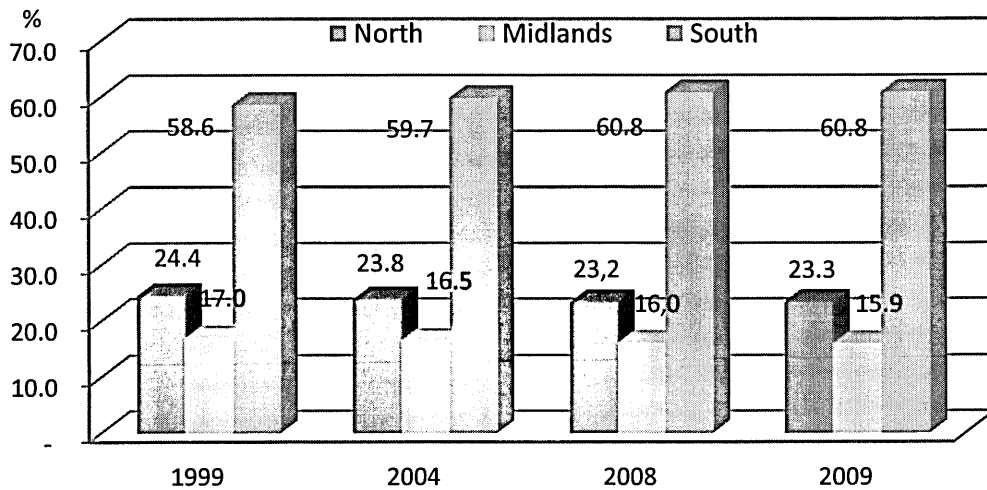
With the belief that regional economic failure was "turning Britain into a nation of regional have's and regional have not's" (Caborn, 1996; DTI, 2000), RDAs were exalted as the primary mechanism for addressing these concerns.

As an indication of the impact of the regional structures on inequalities in regional economic performance, Figure 1 show that the gap in the share of total GVA (workplace based) for the Northern regions (North East, and West, YH), Midlands (East and West) and the South (South East and West of England and London). From 1999-2004 the share of GVA of the Southern regions has seen increase by some 1 per cent and the share of both Northern regions and the Midlands decreased in equal proportions. In the successive four years this picture remained essentially unaltered. In the whole 1999-2008 period the percentage of total GVA of the Northern regions decreased by some 1.1 per cent and that of the South increased by 2.2 per cent. These figures are only indicative (and can take no account of added value) nonetheless they corroborate the suggestion that far from levelling the playing field for the English regions, the failure to incorporate macroeconomic issues may have served to emphasise the regional economic chasm (Harrison, 2006).

Rather than being in the vanguard as "economic powerhouses" (DTLR and Cabinet Office, 2002) for the regeneration of regions RDAs were more akin to 'business incubators' or to equivalent models of business support. The problem was that of a distorted reality where RDAs found that they were pushed towards

dealing with an agenda that was over and above their means. All this therefore seems to provide further support to Morgan's (2006, p. 158) contention that "there appears to be no cause, neither sustainability in the South nor deprivation in the north, that can rival the allure of higher economic growth as the top priorities of Labour politicians".

**Figure 1: Percentage of total workplace based GVA (current basic prices) for the North (North East and West, YH), Midlands and South (East of England, London, South East and West).**



Source: Office for National Statistics, \*provisional

## 2.2 Economic regionalism and the opportunity of a referendum on elected Regional Assemblies

There are always tensions related to the role of existing institutions as these attempt to defend their resources threatened by emergent bodies. In part this underpinned the debate around the scope of RDAs responsibilities and their conception narrowly as strategic bodies with limited funds, exercising control and influence over a limited number of areas. In the years following their establishment, RDAs were provided with increased sets of responsibilities as well as additional resources and flexibilities. In 2003, the RDAs gained responsibility for preparing 'Frameworks for regional employment and skills', while the 2002 Spending Review confirmed increases in the agencies' budgets and strengthened their role in areas such as housing, tourism and transport. In 2005, business support services provided by Business Link were devolved to RDAs, proposals were made to integrate further the planning of the agencies' and the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) budgets and extend the agencies' remit to comprise inward investment, business-university collaboration and the delivery of socio-economic objectives in rural areas (Pearce and Ayeres, 2009). As the RDAs gained new functions, pressures mounted for their coordination. Prior to 2002 the agencies' activities were dominated by 'legacy' programmes; thereafter they were granted the flexibility to switch resources within three year 'single programmes', or Single Pot, which pooled sponsor departments' budgets in ways considered critical for their ability to perform their 'value added role'<sup>6</sup> (HM Treasury, 2000). These developments were in part related to the Treasury's emerging support for the RDAs in connection with its 'discovery' of their potential in terms of their contribution to increase productivity levels in the region (Tomaney and

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<sup>6</sup>The notion of Strategic Added Value was formalised in 2006 by the consultants SQW in the context of the development of the RDAs impact evaluation framework. It rationalises the role of the RDAs with respect to regional partners and comprised five main components: strategic leadership and catalyst; strategic influence; funding leverage; synergy; engagement or involving stakeholders in the design and delivery of regional activities. Longlands and Markus (2006) argued that as a measure of the impact of the RDAs this notion is characterised by ambiguities and flaws.

Hetherington, 2004). The consolidation of the links with a significant centre of power within Whitehall reflected also in new performance management arrangements which raised significant concerns in relation to the effective impact of the above measures in terms of reconfigurations of inter-state relations. For example, for the House of Commons Committee on Public Accounts (2004) targets developed by the centre with RDAs had led to tensions between regional and national priorities and the Agencies focusing too much on short-term contributions to Whitehall objectives and too little on long-term strategic impact in the region. It called for improved targeting, a streamlining of funding streams and action from Whitehall to align activities of different organisations including skills and transport. The report provided the RDAs with the opportunity to apply pressure on DTI to replace traditional top-down ways of Whitehall working with an “emerging culture of greater trust, freedom and flexibility” (RDA National Secretariat, 2004, quoted in Pearce and Ayeres, 2009, p. 548). The 2005 Tasking Framework held out the promise of securing greater complementarities between the priorities identified in the RESs and PSA targets (DTI, 2005a).

This required that each RDA should show in their corporate plans how they intended to address the priorities in their RES and contribute to the delivery of the national public services agreements (PSA) targets on regional economic performance, sustainable development, national productivity and reducing productivity disparities in rural areas. PSA targets were also translated into more specific ‘Tier 2’ (regional) and Tier 3 (core output) targets for individual RDAs<sup>7</sup>.

The new framework was characterised by significant complexity and unclear accountabilities with multiple targets that were “vague...difficult to measure and potentially inconsistent” (McVittie and Swales, 2007a, p. 275). Impacts remained

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<sup>7</sup> The RDAs were expected to make progress on targets related to a set of mandatory ‘core outputs’ within agreed ranges; these focused on: employment creation (the number of jobs created or safeguarded); employment support (the number of people assisted to get a job); business creation (the number of new businesses created and demonstrating growth after 12 months and businesses attracted to the region); business support (the number of businesses assisted to improve their performance); regeneration (public and private investment levered, including reclaiming and redeveloping brownfield land; and skills (the number of people assisted in their skills development)..

difficult to judge in part due to the structural circumstances related to the problem of identifying outcomes in policy areas where RDAs had a limited remit.

The Agencies' main tasks continued to be related uniquely to the delivery of economic targets: many of the headline targets remained unaltered with social inclusion targets that were essentially economic and regeneration targets that were mainly business-oriented. There were no core targets related to the environment, social infrastructures, health and inequalities. Through the prescription of a core group of uniform economic output targets Whitehall encouraged the RDAs to pursue identikit competitiveness scripts based upon improving regional institutional thickness, with no clear prioritisation or tailoring of dominant prescriptions to suit local circumstances (Bristow, 2005). As state-sponsored bodies the RDAs had access to (even increasing) resources, these generally could be employed only in ways sanctioned by and within the parameters established by Central Government (cf. Peck, 1995). This indicates that RDAs were more a mechanism to enable Central Government intervention than to support autonomous regional action.

If it is important to reiterate the significance of the influence of the nation state on the process of devolving increased powers towards the regions; even more important perhaps is to emphasise how the state can, in particular circumstances, affect also the outcome of the process of regionalisation. Insights on these can be provided through the events surrounding the development of the proposal for elected Assemblies submitted to the regional electorate in 2004 (cf. Jones, 2001).

The 2002 White Paper (DTLR and Cabinet Office, 2002) and the agreement, at the beginning of Labour's second term, that the three northern regions of England would have the opportunity to advance a referendum for elected Regional Assemblies demonstrated that the regionalist component of Government had been able to negotiate some of the key tensions embedded in the RDA model. In the run up to the referendum, the coalition of regionalists led by the Deputy Prime Minister attempted to negotiate a wide consensus around the proposal across Government (Hetherington and Pinkney, 2004; Tomaney et al. 2005). This consensus, necessary for the plan to go ahead, came at a price. However, as

departments remained reluctant to devolve powers downwards, this coalition had to concede substantial ground, agreeing that increasing responsibilities be given to the regions. The negotiations underpinned the significant gap that opened in the run up to the referendum between the original devolution proposal and the one submitted to the North East electorate on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2004.

This was demonstrated particularly clearly in the agreement for the integration of the regions in the highly centralist frameworks of the Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Reviews and Performance Management Framework. The failure of the central state to remove its influence meant that original and clear argument of the 'Yes' campaign became enmeshed and finally lost in an array of complexities<sup>8</sup>. The resulting 'No' vote inflicted a lethal blow to the regionalist component of Government and its 'vision' exposing internal contradictions and external lack of support.

### **3. From Regions to City-Regions?**

The demise of the plan for an elected regional tier shifted emphasis on partnership working, inter-institutional and public-private cooperation, as a way to find agreement around collective priorities and managing the complexities involved in developing multiple strategies. Given their institutional constraints, the Agencies depended on these mechanisms and in all regions extensive links were established with the sub-regional partnerships based upon individual or groups of local authorities (Pearce and Ayeres, 2009). The RDAs view these as a necessary mechanism in linking regional strategy to local delivery and as a means for strengthening the Agencies' profile in the regions. The sub-regional partners advise the RDA on sub-regional priorities and the RDAs devolve 70 per cent of their funding for projects to local authorities and other delivery agents

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<sup>8</sup>The long time lapse between the White Paper, or Labour election in 1997, and the referendum is an effective indicator of the ambiguities around the 'regional project'. In contrast, for instance, in the same period, in Italy proposals to strengthen the regional infrastructure through increased democratic control were taken forward within eight months from the appointment of the Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema (November 1998-July 1999) whose government saw this as a key to its political project.

A partnership model was also reflected in Local Areas Agreements (LAAs) between central government and local authorities. Furthermore, this model received further attention in connection with the interest in Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) and 'city-regions' and which reflected the belief that the impetus for economic development lies at the city rather than the regional scale.

A number of issues can be noted in relation to the potential over different visions of developmental trajectories in this field. First, these visions might be rooted in the different territorial interests but also nested across different extra-territorial allegiances. For example, significant uncertainty surrounded the status of the RDAs' sub-regional partnership arrangements and 'Local Strategic Partnerships' (LSPs) that the GO and CLG perceive as the prime sub-regional partnership vehicle (Deas and Ward, 2000).

Second, there is the need to consider how different local authorities might have variable desires and capacities and to operate through partnership. This, finally, read in connection with the on-going pressure on the RDA to deliver, through the central targets, provides the sense of the challenges that RDAs faced in the regions.

In part, the SNR published by Government in 2007 represents the acknowledgement of the need for greater clarity and rationality in regional/sub-regional relations in the governance of economic development. Before considering the impact of the SNR, the next section explores the significance of the sub-regional dimension of governance in England and the circumstances of the re-emergence of the city-region.

### *3.1 The re-emergence of the city-region and the SNR*

Alongside the reassertion of the standard region from the mid 1990s a second axis of institution building revolved around geographically smaller city-regional areas (Deas and Ward, 2000). This followed in the wake of the period of acute disruption of metropolitan governance in England that unfolded from 1979 to 1997. During this time, the Thatcher and Major Conservative governments had attempted to



reduce and remove local powers and eradicate the domination of the Labour Party in most of England's large cities. At the heart of this were the extensively chronicled attempts to limit the scale of resource transfer from the centre to localities while concomitantly undermining the fiscal autonomy of local authorities. At the same time, the attempt was made to transfer local authority functions to a range of appointed non-departmental public bodies and to the private sector. All this culminated in the abolition of the upper tier of metropolitan government and its replacement by a set of unitary authorities within each of England's principal conurbations.

Part of local government's response to these direct challenges was an effort to compensate for the lack of a formal tier of metropolitan government by developing working arrangements that straddled individual local authority territories and embraced other public and private sector bodies (Deas and Hebbert, 1999). While few of these innovations have sought directly to replace the old metropolitan structures, their inadvertent impact has been to create a number of bodies with the task to govern city-regions. As with the larger regions in which they sat, the emergence of new city-regional institutions and alliances to some extent reflected the modish, new regionalist argument that local or regional territories occupy pivotal status within the global economy. As a result, these territories require the resources to enable them to compete effectively against other units in the global context. But they also reflect a belief that the success of the wider metropolis must be built from a strong city core rather than the region.

Despite the abolition of metropolitan authorities, these actors appeared to retain a level of influence as testified in particular by the activities of the Core Cities (Core Cities Group, 2004), an assemblage of the local authorities of England's eight most prominent provincial cities. While the policy debate focused on the development of the new regional policy in 2003-04, the city-regional agenda "was slowly bubbling away under the surface" (Harrison, 2007, p.317) in particular through the work of the Core Cities Group. The crux of the Core Cities argument was that enduring economic under-performance in much of the English North and Midlands (and particularly in their urban-industrial heartlands), and the not

unrelated dominance of London and the South-east region, can only be addressed by creating new institutional configurations that recognise city-regional boundaries. Rather than a return to some variant of formal metropolitan government, new city-regional partnerships (perhaps statutory, though possibly voluntary) of local authorities and other institutional actors would be a solution. The political agenda of the Core Cities made extensive use of the 'economic competitiveness' idea and the related discourse of the need to "add more cylinders to the UK's economic engine" (ODPM, 2003, p.2).

With policy interventions targeted at regional level and the prospect of the further consolidation of the regional project, following the announcement of the regional referendum, local authorities and other stakeholders mobilised in the prospect that the region would become more important in the distribution of development funding, to promote projects and create alliances to push their interests. If the outcome of the 2004 referendum left the regional project in a limbo, by this time the argument for increased attention to sub-regions had taken its shape (Healey, 2007). These could be metropolitan areas or more rural areas with multiple towns. In some cases, the pressure to create sub-regional alliances, was precisely to counter-act the potential that major cities, the big players in the core cities movement, would capture all funding available to regions.

Meanwhile at national level, the then ODPM was addressing the question of the investment needs of growth promotion in the South through the 'Sustainable Communities Action Plan' (ODPM, 2003) whose core proposal consisted in the channelling national urban development investment in new growth areas in the South-East. In this context, the pressure from the Core Cities campaign in the North on the Ministry led to the launch of a new regional initiative, the Northern Way. This encompassed most of the core cities and encouraged them to create city-regional arenas within an overarching umbrella (Counsell and Houghton, 2006). Envisaged as being advanced by an alliance of the three Northern RDAs and core cities, the Northern Way's spatial strategy recognised the importance of inter-connections across the UK space economy for urban development investment decisions. However, it soon became evident that it lacked capacity and

resources or even a political base and it constituted little more than a momentary political expedient. By early 2006, the Northern Way had been overshadowed by the 'new localism' and the 'city-regionalism'. The former would devolve more financial and programmatic autonomy to municipalities and associations of municipalities while the latter played more into the 'economic competitiveness' argument. The Treasury proclaimed: "there is significant empirical evidence to suggest that the co-ordination of economic policies across the city-region is conducive to economic performance" (HM Treasury, 2006, p.13), while a similar logic was used by DCLG (2006, p.73) to argue how "further devolution needs to encourage and reinforce this co-ordination and collaboration and so ensure maximum impact by better aligning decision-making with real economic geographies such as city-regions".

As political responsibilities shifted at national level in the course of 2006, the city-region itself appeared to lose ground in favour of the more politically neutral reference to 'sub-regions'.

The Government's SNR (HM Treasury et al. 2007) published in mid-2007 appeared to follow a middling course, emphasising the need for clarity, continuity and local acceptability and advocating a combination of strong regional coordination and increased local flexibility.

In terms of concrete proposals these included: a streamlining of arrangements at regional level, bringing together economic development and spatial planning in a 'single' strategy under the aegis of the RDAs and simplifying the Tasking Framework through a single growth target; a strengthening of the local authority role, including new instruments for them to promote local economic development; and the introduction of a mechanism for developing greater sub-regional cooperation in the form of MAAs which extended the model hitherto utilised for LAAs (three-year agreements developed by councils with their partners and then negotiated with the relevant Government Office) so as to cover a wider set of organisations.

The Review stated that RDAs should delegate responsibility for funding to local authorities and sub-regions "where possible, unless there is a clear case for

retaining funding at regional level or there is a lack of capacity at lower levels” (HM Treasury et al, 2007, p.8). However, the Review also left uncertainty about how sub-regional groupings would demonstrate their capacity:

DCLG's preferred position is a presumption that RDAs will delegate funds unless there are extenuating circumstances. DBERR's preference is that local authorities will need to make a formal case as to why they should be delegated responsibility.

(p. 615)

Out of a total of thirteen sub- and city-regional groupings that had been working on proposals that were considered in the first round of MAAs (DCLG, 2007), only seven were signed by the Government's original deadline of June 2008. This was widely interpreted in terms of the adoption of a 'selective' approach, one which favoured some coalitions and projects more in line with the agendas of RDAs and their parent department. Furthermore, the idea that local authorities would be able to play a significant role in economic development contrasted with the reality of variegated sub-regional landscapes where local actors possessed variable levels of capacities to play an effective role.

Following the sign off of the first wave of MAAs, DCLG (2008) announced:

in a contract with Government, councils working together with local agencies ... will get more freedoms from Whitehall in return for pledging a local, partnership approach to boost economic growth and tackle deprivation and financial inequalities.

In fact the arrangements were such that sub-regional agents did not have a direct line of contact with Whitehall and to achieve their objectives had to engage with regional structures. In the case of MAAs these were approved by the GOs but the amount of resources provided depended on their discussions with RDAs and them buying in into the single strategy.

Although the provisions in the SNR held the promise of reforming existing regional arrangements so as to ensure greater sub-regional discretion, significant political barriers remained as testified by the how the RDAs and MAAs were constrained by the centrally-determined growth target.

In this context, as observed by Harrison (2007), re-organising the state could merely add to an already tangled hierarchy and distract attention from the state's continued ability to steer subnational governance to meet national interests and avoid tackling the economic disparities between and within regions.

A further step could be the establishment of statutory, legally binding city-regional structures empowered to deal with economic development. This "would enable funding and responsibility to be devolved or delegated directly to the sub-region, rather than to individual local authorities" (Burch et al., 2008b, p. 6). This could be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen MAAs and secure greater policy discretion. On 22 April 2009, in the context of the 2009 Budget, Leeds and Manchester were indicated as two forerunner statutory city-regions. However this indication proceeded with no clear understanding in relation to scale, scope and timeline of city-regional devolution. When the issue finally went through Parliament, the 2009 Act did little to clear the fog around the extent of enhanced powers the new bodies would be guaranteed. In its assessment of the Government's proposal, the House of Commons Business and Enterprise Committee (2009, par. 161) were "surprised and disappointed with the lack of detail within the Government's proposals" observing that it represented an "unnecessary addition" to the existing sub-national organisations and strategies, rather than 'life after regions'.

## Conclusions

New Labour was ostensibly committed to the devolution of a range of economic development powers and funding to enable stakeholders to identify and capitalise on their unique strengths of their regions and provide greater coordination between different policy initiatives and levels of government.

The RDAs were able to gain an important role in relation to the Government's 'agenda to increase regional productivity and, with time, gained increasing funding and responsibilities. They also provided a channel for the concerns of regional elites that previously were not always expressed and some levels of flexibility in adapting national policies pointing to the potential not only to perform the 'value-added' role envisaged for them by the Treasury but also that of mediators in multi-scalar governance context between the agenda of Whitehall on the one hand, and that of sub-regional interests on the other. This chapter, however, has brought attention on the tensions incorporated in the RDAs as a result of Labour's idiosyncratic approach in which embryonic regionalisation proceeded alongside traditional ways of Whitehall working and central-local relations.

RDAs were scrutinised by Assemblies and subject to the influence associated with working in partnership with various regional and local partners.

In the absence of regional devolution, however the Agencies were regarded principally as mechanisms for the delivery of a limited set of centrally determined targets. Although they were provided with increased budgets and flexibilities these did not fundamentally undermine the role of the nation state as key force behind the definition of major aspects of local and regional economic governance (Brenner, 2003).

The RDAs were super-imposed on a highly fragmented institutional landscape where the majority of the funding for delivering economic development goals was endowed to other institutions on which the Agencies had only limited influence. The account in this chapter conveyed the sense of a highly complex institutional environment created by previous rounds of state restructuring with repercussions

on the relations between the RDAs and its partners as well as internal to the agency.

More crucially, while emphasis is placed on the RDAs' role in addressing regional disparities and improve the economic performance of regions, they are undermined by New Labour's rejection for a spatial framework to address spatial-political in England and the associated discourse that 'every region can be a winner'.

This is however only part of the story. From the mid-2000s the debate over the governance of sub-national economic development was characterised by a renewed emphasis towards the central-local axis through the focus on a partnership model based on the 'city-region' and MAAs, in line with the argument that the cities, rather than regions, were the competitive territories 'par excellence'. In the context of the UK particular brand new networked arrangements added to, rather than replaced, the existing regional arrangements.

First, although the 'city-region' had been slowly bubbling under the surface for a long time, in particular through the work of the Core Cities Group, it was the crisis of the region and Government's search for a new scalar fix that licenced the shift in focus. Second, there was a problem of definition that reflected in the oscillating trajectory leading to the SNR; this was underpinned by multiple spatial imaginaries promoted by a web of institutions and interests. Third, the continued ambivalence of the New Labour government's approach towards increased devolution to sub-national territories characterised by the persistence of traditional accountability mechanisms and divisions within Whitehall. Fourth and related, city-regional alliances were unable to escape from the shadow of the existing regional and national framework.

The provisions in the SNR and those concerning statutory city can be seen as emerging from the recognition of the need for plugging and/or bridging the gap left by previous institutions, strategies and models of economic development. Yet, they continued to be constrained and hampered by the same policies whose problems they were mobilised to address. If one sees models, institutions and strategies that the state leaves in place as being there to protect its control over

the management of uneven development we can understand why the state shapes its policies in the way it does.

It remains clearly critical to articulate the role of the state, and the re-scaling of its functions across its different territorial branches, in relation to the endeavour to understand the current restructuration of sub-national governance

It is argued however that if we are to take seriously the issue of political agency and strategy and their significance, there is also the need to move beyond perspectives that tend to be focused on state/regional or state/city-regional dynamics and shed more empirical light on the interactions between the region and other scales such as the local and sub-regional.



# 5. Researching Regional Spaces

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for a single region case study methodology. In 1999, at the zenith of the new regionalist 'orthodoxy', Ann Markusen produced an incisive methodological critique of urban and regional research, published in the pages of *Regional Studies*. In 2003 and 2004 in the pages of the same journal, a prolific debate unfolded around the principal arguments of that critique (Peck, 2003; Hudson, 2003; Lagendjik, 2003; Markusen, 2003). Such debate provided some crucial pointers for the methodological choices that have informed the research approach in this study. This chapter takes the cue from some of the key terms of this methodological debate. While many of the criticisms raised by Markusen with respect to the methodological weaknesses of some regionalist research were widely shared among scholars, marked divergences distinguished the diagnoses. In outlining this position this study recognises, however, that it was weakened by one missing link: the provision of a more clear and detailed framework capable of specifying what these "better forms of case studies" (Lagendjik, 2003 p. 275) might look like.

I argue that there is a need to strengthen the link between theoretical reconstructions and methodological reflections in order to develop the empirically based programme of research necessary to complete the reconstruction of regional research.

The first part of the chapter reflects on the *Regional Studies* debate on case studies. The second part outlines the main dimensions of focus in relation to this thesis' case study region, Yorkshire and the Humber.

## 2. Case Study Methodology and Regional Research

This section develops the methodological debate triggered by the critique of Markusen (1999). It responds to the methodological challenges concerning the kind of knowledge, the standard of evidence and the conceptualisation of theory raised through this debate. It traces the gap between theoretical and methodological critique identifying a space for developing a form of regional case study for advancing knowledge of state space.

### 2.1 Fuzzy conceptualisation, policy relevance and 'better forms of case study' in regional research

This research adopts a single case study methodology. The assumptions underlying this methodological choice inevitably need to confront wider questions relative to the kind of knowledge this research aims to produce. One question regards the location of the research in the knowledge space that lies between contemporary work of critical urban and regional researchers and the knowledge policy-makers make use of in order to frame<sup>9</sup> day to day problems. Indeed an increasing ontological and epistemological gap appears to separate the two domains which has led some scholars to call for a 'policy turn' in geographical research (Markusen, 1999; also Martin, 2001; Dorling and Shaw, 2002). For its proponents, such a turn could take place only through drastic amendments in the methods of contemporary urban and regional research. Such amendments, which should be directed at making research more amenable to affect change in the 'real world', were to involve a departure from intensive case study research methodologies. The debate that developed around these arguments, in particular around the questions raised by Markusen's (1999), has provided useful guidelines for this research's design. Markusen's methodological critique was constructed

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<sup>9</sup>Framing refers to the process whereby actors 'frame' policy problems and solutions in ways that correspond to their beliefs, perceptions, and arguments (Fisher, 2003).

around a set of interrelated themes that she considered as key to the declining societal relevance and scientific rigour of regional studies. In the first place, she coined the powerful metaphor of 'fuzzy concept' to indicate an entity, phenomenon, or process, with two or more alternative meanings. Second, she argued that the standards of evidence of regional research are slipping. Third, the 'fuzzy' character of concepts make the job of coming up with evidence much more difficult. And, finally, poverty of evidence results in toleration of 'fuzzy concepts' and in misguided policy. Martin (2001) renewed this criticism arguing that the deficiency, in terms of policy relevance, of much of contemporary human geography "is compounded by the theoretical and linguistic obfuscation that now characterizes so much of the subject" (p.195). This, he argued, is at the root of a noticeable retreat from empirical and explanatory rigour. The concerns of Markusen and Martin can be seen as echoing the criticisms surrounding the conceptual terminology that imbues a large part of new regionalist research with terms such as 'institutional milieu', 'intelligent regions', 'untraded interdependencies', 'social capital', and 'institutional thickness' (MacKinnon and Cumbers 2002). Markusen's invitation to regional scholars to confront the question: "how do I know it when I see it?" is certainly valuable for inducing further reflection on the standard of rigour underlying the relation between concepts and evidence. A level of cautiousness however is required when considering the call for greater policy engagement. Focused exclusively on matters internal to geographical research, the advocates of a 'policy turn' gave little consideration to how declining standards of evidence or fuzzy conceptualisation, rather than being a cause of policy irrelevance, could stem instead from the growing demand for, and supply of, 'quick fix' policy recipes (Lovering, 1999; Imrie, 2004). This argument effectively shifts the terms of the debate on policy relevance bringing the attention instead on issue of how material reality and evidence inform or misinform policy and political debates. Rather than by the concern to establish a connection with the 'real world', the perspective in this study is underpinned by the acknowledgement that the same material reality can give rise to different political constructions of regionalism.

Markusen correctly emphasised the need for greater standards of rigour in the relation between concepts and evidence but she also went further, suggesting that by asking the question “how do I recognise them when I see them?” over and over, concepts could be as associated with a checklist of “characteristics that could be unequivocally posited and would be understood in the same way by all readers” (p. 703). Such an approach was deemed necessary to implement the principles of “sound academic research”, where such principles imply that “someone else could replicate [the research’s] field work and verify the validity of his conclusions” (ibid). Though sympathetic to Markusen’s critique of prevailing research practices in regional studies the responses of Lagendjik (2003), Peck (2003) and Hudson (2003) express strong reservations in relation to what they see as an implicit alliance with quantitative methods<sup>10</sup>. In the most overtly critical of these responses, Peck’s (2003) became ‘irritated’ by Markusen’s apparent implication that regional researchers using interviews and qualitative methods were “avoiding the hard work” and pursuing “flashy but insubstantial theory construction” (2003, p. 73). The crux of Peck’s argument is that rather than rejecting qualitative case research, there remained scope for extending case-study research so long as the challenge was met to develop rigorous research designs and validity checks “to set the bar high in terms of standards of corroboration and triangulation, in a fashion that is consistent with the methods and modes that are being employed” (p. 736). The defence of qualitative case study research advanced by Peck and other scholars was based on a discussion of the misconceptions with regard to the nature of interpretation in case study research. Referring to the methodological literature (Mitchell, 1983; Flyvbjerg, 2002) as well as their own work, these contributions effectively clarified the methodological position of the case study contributing to refocusing the methodological debate towards “not less but *better* forms of case study” (Lagendjik, p. 725, original emphasis). However, concerned mostly with deconstructing the arguments levelled against their own work, these advocates of qualitative regional case studies refrained from engaging with the more challenging part of suggesting, “how we should move forward” (Martin, 2001).

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<sup>10</sup>This is a point that Markusen (2003) refutes in her rejoinder.

In fact the pointers to follow in order to move regional case study research forward were already available in the methodological debate. First, Peck's argument was based on what is seen as a misconception of the role and value of interview based case study research. Second, Markusen's stance was supported by the increasing emphasis on 'process' evidenced by the "preponderance of words which were once nouns or verbs transformed into adjectives, process verbs and then again into process nouns with -isation" (Markusen, 1999, p. 870). While this is a valid argument so is Peck's response that, referring to its own work, points out:

You can't see labour market segmentation, or at least I can't...Markusen would apparently push such concerns out of bounds for critical regional studies, because they are insufficiently concrete. This then, is strike one on her fuzziness test, failing on 'how would I know it when I see it?'

(Peck, 2003, p. 732 original emphasis)

Paradoxically the region seems to have been overlooked in this debate. Only once for Hudson's mention 'the region' arguing: "proponents of relational conceptions in the social sciences would challenge any suggestion that there is a single 'essential' definition of a concept" (2003, p. 746). As essentially indeterminate social formations, by definition, regions fail Markusen's fuzzy test, as other historically and geographically produced social phenomena do. This certainly cannot be reason to turn attention away from the region and abandon qualitative research methods. In dealing with this, the role of concrete research should not be one of looking for one-to-one correspondences or of isolating causal processes through replication. Rather, the challenge is one of navigating through complexity, bringing clarity of conceptual understanding to how networks, structures, processes, and institutions interact in the production of region as strategic sites in the geography of capitalism. This study maintains that case study research remains a crucial tool for addressing this challenge with the validity of any associated theoretical claim deriving not from experimental replication but through the logic of substantive argument, one that consolidates in the interplay between the accumulation of experience 'in the field' and the knowledge synthesised in the theoretical framework. Therefore the main issue is not case study research per se

but the way in which some of it fails to attend to the standards of rigour evoked by Markusen. The critical question of indicating how to 'move forward' case study research to achieve high standards of rigour remained suspended in the gap between methodological reflection and theoretical advancement in regional research

### 2.3 Bridging the gap between theoretical advancement and methodological reflection

If the methodological debate in regional studies highlighted the crucial question of the need for 'better forms of case study', it did little address the question of how these 'better forms of case study' should look like. Considering this issue in connection with the reflections in chapter 2 and 3 on the work of Brenner and other scholars serves to reiterate that advancements in critical regional studies have long been undermined by the tendency for methodological reflection, concrete inquiry and theoretical advancement to proceed on separate planes. A greater level of methodological reflection in relation to the work on state rescaling is needed to provide greater clarity to the distinction between the different levels of the dialectical spiral (from the abstract to the concrete) around which this body of work is organised.

Thinking about the region in relation to these different levels of the spiral highlights its as an 'in between space' (Jonas, 2006) and the continued relevance of regional research as a domain for linking the 'abstract' to the 'concrete' in the context of efforts to advance knowledge of state space. The reconsideration of the critical realism paradigm, in connection to the methodological position of case study research, is critical in this. Understood to be consistent with, and an extension to, the strategic relational approach (Jessop, 2001), critical realism is noted for placing emphasis on the requirement to establish retroductive connections between structure and agency in a temporally sensitive manner (Castellacci, 2006). Intensive research based on a single region case study allows multiple policy frameworks, with their different scalar dimensions interacting or coming into

conflict in or around the region, to be traced. These multi-scalar and multi-dimensional connections cannot be captured through “chaotic conception [which] arbitrarily divides the indivisible and/or lumps together the unrelated” (Sayer, 1992, p.138). Through ‘rational abstraction’ it is possible to retain the necessary sensitivity to the uniqueness of the region as well as establishing the links between the region and other scales.

This study’s brand of ‘concrete’ second wave regionalist research develops a multi-scalar multi-dimensional analysis of the trans(-formation) of a particular region, the YH region in England; the case choice rather than on criteria of typicality, is based on its explanatory power with respect to the key dimensions of the theoretical framework.

### **3. The Case Study Region**

This section presents the rationale for focusing this research on the YH region and delineates the main dimensions that define the case study. These include institutions, processes and actors at various levels involved in a sub-regionally specific politics of scale.

#### **3.1 Locating the research in the Yorkshire and the Humber Region**

The YH region and the Sheffield City Region provide an appropriate site of research for considering the historically embedded nature of state spatial restructuring. In particular this study focuses on two successive sets of institutional reconfigurations that coincided with first, the instalment of the new RDA, Yorkshire Forward, in 1999 and, second, the attempt, in the post-2004 period to advance new partnerships around networked city-regions in the region.

One question arising from this choice regards the ‘proximity’ of the case location. Developing the argument that qualitative case study research provides an ‘easy route’ on the part of researchers, Markusen identified a tendency whereby

scholars privilege researching “their own back yard”, thereby promoting a form of “provincial boosterism” (2003, p.713). In the context of this study ‘proximity’ undoubtedly played a role in case selection. Crucially, it is argued, this in itself should not suffice to conceal the fact that the YH region presented an ideal location for this study. This, again, points us to redress the critique of Markusen: the focus of attention in arguing for higher standards of rigour in regional case studies should not be the issue of ‘proximity’ per se, but rather the wider reasoning behind the choice of location. For example, when such reasoning is made explicit in regional research it appears often a product of retroductive rationalisation, re-constructed on the basis of the outcomes of the research. This research avoids this practice through the endorsement of Mitchell's observation that “there is absolutely no advantage in going to a great deal of trouble to find a typical case” and making explicit why, despite its convenient location, the YH region was an ideal location for its ‘explanatory power’ with respect to key dimensions that are the focus of this study.

The YH region was one of the three northern regions designated by government as being at the forefront of the planned regional devolution process and chosen as the sites for a first round of regional referendums. A preferential route was provided to these regions on the basis of a supposed stronger ‘sense of regionalism’ in comparison with the rest of the other English regions (Hazell, 2006). At the outset these circumstances configured each of the three northern regions as a potentially apt location for researching the dynamics associated with the impact of the new RDA regionalism. A large body of regionalist work exists on the North East region, considered the home of the regionalist campaign (Tomaney, 1999; Tomaney and Ward, 2001; Pike, 2002), while the North West is considered as an especially contested region, with tensions crystallised around the large urban areas therein (Deas and Ward, 2000; Jonas and Ward, 2002; Harrison, 2008). There is also significant body of work that has focused on the YH region to explore issues of multi-level governance in the context of the management of EU Structural Funds (Bache, 2000; Armstrong and Wells, 2006; Bache and Chapman, 2008). This strand brought into focus problems associated with complex social and



spatial divisions of labour in relation in particular to the coordination of various spatial scales and the economic development and the social sustainability agendas. This study explores the multi-scalar production of the YH region from a broader perspective that attempts to move beyond the focus on a single policy issue to consider coordination problems across multiple agendas.

The new regional policy framework of the New Labour Government faced peculiar challenges (in terms of extent and nature) encountering the specific political, institutional and economic structures of the YH region.

### 3.2 The economic landscape

The YH region covers most of the historic county of Yorkshire, along with the part of Northern Lincolnshire that was, from 1974 to 1996, within the former shire county of Humberside. It embraces a population of approximately five million and a workforce of 2.3 million or just under 9 per cent of the UK total (ONS, 2010). It is worth looking at some socio-economic indicators that can provide a sense of the landscape faced by the RDA on the eve of its establishment. Although the region accounted for the 7.5 per cent of the UK's GDP, the average GDP per capita was only 88 per cent of the UK average (ONS, 2001). South Yorkshire's deteriorating GDP per capita, 74 per cent of the UK average, having fallen below 75 per cent of the EU average, qualified the area for £740 million of EU Objective 1 structural assistance. The main socio-economic challenges in the areas affected by the new regional institutions remained those related to the deindustrialisation of the 1980s and 1990s. Yorkshire's remaining deep mines, including those of the Selby coalfield, continued their decline throughout the first term of the new Labour Government while the steel industry and engineering sector in the region continued to face major restructuring (Gore and Jones, 2006). This picture reflects also in a set of socio-economic indicators that show how, under many respects, in the period when the RDA was established, only the North East prevented the YH from being the most deprived region. In 2000, 24 per cent of individuals lived in

households with incomes in the bottom quintile of income distribution in the UK (ONS, 2001). Variations were also particularly pronounced across the region. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 showed the sub-regions of SY and North Yorkshire (NY) presenting virtually a mirror image of one another: 37 per cent of neighbourhoods in SY were classed as being in the most deprived quintile, compared to 5 per cent for NY (ODPM, 2004). On the other hand, 7 per cent of neighbourhoods in SY were within the least deprived quintile, compared to 31 per cent in NY. Economic transformations and the transition to a post-industrial economic order have traced an increasing polarisation in economic resources and quality of life. The wealth gap has manifested especially within cities. Disconnections from spatial, economic and social points of view have outlined the emergence of twin-track or two speed cities, of which Sheffield and Leeds have become paradigmatic examples (Bruff, 2002; Gore and Jones, 2006). For example, Sheffield contains areas of high deprivation, with 36 per cent of LSOAs within the top 20 per cent most deprived LSOAs. These are located largely in the east reflecting the geographical polarisation of the city (Sheffield City Council, 2006). The polarisation of living conditions of residents is distinguishable in other parts of the region. In the east of the region data on household earnings and economic activity show a picture of the lagging economy of Hull with respect to increasing affluent East Riding (ONS, 2004).

Crucially for the new RDA, the region struggled to perform competitively on each of the drivers of regional productivity identified by the Treasury: skills, enterprise, innovation and investment (ONS, 2004). For example, looking at the regional performance on the skills driver, low levels of educational attainment and qualification present a crucial challenge for a region aspiring to compete in the global knowledge economy. Only 41.9 per cent of the pupils obtained five GCSEs or SCEs. Within the region, Kingston upon Hull scored the worst performance in England with only 24.4 per cent of its pupils obtaining this standard. Only 12.2 per cent of the region's population were qualified at degree level and 17.2 per cent possessed "no qualification" compared to the English average of 15.3 (ONS, 2004). In terms of enterprise capacity in the region, ONS (2004) data on business

registrations show that the YH was the only region in England where de-registration outnumbered registrations in 1999, 2000 and 2001. With regard to the investment driver, the number of successful regional projects that have attracted inward investment almost halved from 1999-2000 to the 2000-2001 both in the area of manufacturing and non-manufacturing, accounting for the biggest drop of all regions and nations in the UK (ibid). In terms of innovation, research and development expenditure accounted to only the 0.5 per cent of the regional GDP, the lowest percentage of all the English regions at the time of the instalment of RDAs (ibid). The picture painted above can give an idea of the extent of the challenge faced by the new RDA Yorkshire Forward when in the aftermath of its establishment declared the aspiration to lever a radical improvement in the YH economy (Yorkshire Forward, 1999), an issue that will be subject in detail exploration in chapters 7 and 8.

### 3.3 The political-institutional landscape

Patchy rounds of re-defining administrative boundaries and associated re-badging highlight the nature of YH as a peculiarly “hybrid” region (Lee, 2002; p.49). The 1974 local government re-organisation replaced the ancient county of Yorkshire and its Ridings with a fourfold division into the counties of Humberside, NY, West Yorkshire (WY) and SY, the latter two constituted as metropolitan counties and the former as shire counties. The Metropolitan Counties of SY and WY were short-lived entities. Consistently under Labour control, the adoption of interventionist stances in areas such as industrial and welfare policy and the inevitable confrontations with Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government of the time, culminated in their abolition in 1986 (Gore and Jones, 2006). The functions of the Counties were devolved to the boroughs and to joint sub-regional boards covering fire, police and public transport (Kingdom, 1991). Despite the presence of some special joint arrangements, in SY and WY significant levels of inter-borough activities will reappear only much later, catalysed by the governance requirements

of EU Structural Funds in the former (Dabinett, 2005) and the RDA's Single Pot in the latter.

The abolition of the Metropolitan Counties was followed by a patchy re-organisation of local government in NY and the Humberside in 1996. The origin of the latter was in part related to a fashionable development idea of the 1960s, the estuarine growth zones (DEA, 1969). With no history as a shire, and seen as being imposed from the top, Humberside's spatial context had a history of longstanding contestation (Lee, 2008). The physical connection, through the Humber Bridge between the northern and southern banks opened in 1981, had only limited impact in terms of the provision of greater coherence to the sub-region. These tensions culminated when, in 1996, the county of Humberside was abolished, replaced by a set of unitary authorities, along with the restoration not only of the East Riding (in name) but also of the historic boundary between Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The issues of historical identity at the root of a popular wave of opposition to Humberside co-existed with more pragmatic concerns for maintaining a level of collaboration around economic development and regeneration initiatives at a sub-regional scale. This seems to be proved by how, in response to such concerns, in 1993, the prospective unitary authorities set up the Humber Economic Forum as a voluntary private public partnership in charge principally of regeneration activities centred on the Humber ports.

In contrast, the transformations in NY were relatively minor. Here the main modification was the provision of expanded boundaries for the city of York, which also became a unitary authority freeing itself from the dictates of the County Council. The remainder of the area retained its two-tier set-up of county and districts. Beside the rounds of local government re-organisations, different experiences and intensities of regeneration funding regimes, EU Structural Funds in particular, also played a crucial role in giving shape to the patchy political and institutional landscape that characterised the YH region. From 1994 to 1999 parts of YH were designated as eligible for Objective 2 funding. These included the whole of SY and, typically, the urban former industrial areas of WY (the southern part of the sub-region, including most of Bradford, parts of Kirklees, Calderdale

and Wakefield) and the Humber (Hull, Grimsby and Scunthorpe). The peripheral rural parts of North Yorkshire were instead eligible for Objective 5b. The European Commission provided support to have strong single regional programmes in this period; however it also recognised that in YH sub-regional delivery arrangements were also required. In the 2000-06 programming period this pattern continued with the significant difference that SY was designated Objective 1 area<sup>11</sup> and provided with a bespoke set of delivery arrangements.

Prior to the establishment of Yorkshire Forward in 1999 researchers had observed that, in the context of a differentiated polity, characterised by proliferating urban and sub-regionally based networks, nascent levels of regionalisation could be detected in connection with the creation of the new Government Office for YH. The policy developed by the Labour Party in opposition first, and in Government later, reinforced the momentum of these patterns of regionalisation (While, 2000). However, other developments contributed to reinforce existing contradictory tendencies. In particular, in SY the Objective 1 EU Structural Funds assistance was seen to mark the development of a distinct set of structures and opportunities, raising important questions in relation to the constitution of the sub-region as a 'space for itself' in the context of the wider regional arrangements (Bache, 1999; see also Bache and Chapman 2008).

These unique circumstances underpin the choice of the YH region and the Sheffield City Region as appropriate sites of research on the basis of their potential explanatory power in relation to this study's interest for issues of political agency and struggle in the formation and transformation of the region.

### 3.4 The Sheffield City Region: the economic landscape

The Sheffield City Region covered two regions, and therefore prior to their abolition, involved two RDAs, two sub-regional partnerships (SRPs), eight local authorities and the Peak District National Park Authority. The metropolitan area

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<sup>11</sup>For 2000-06, as a successor to Objective 5b, coastal and rural areas in North Yorkshire were designated as Objective 2.

that comprised the four SY local authorities has an estimated population of 1.3 million inhabitants (ONS, 2009). The authorities of Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley surround the core city of Sheffield. Alongside the four Metropolitan City Councils of the Sheffield urban area, the wider city-region comprising the four East Midlands' authorities of Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire and has an estimated population of 1.7 million (ONS, 2009).

In the past the area was strongly associated with the coal and steel industries that had dominated the less favoured regions of the UK and underwent fundamental changes when it suffered acute problems through the 1980s and 1990s. These impacted critically on the function and identity of the area, creating a new pattern of uneven development within the urban structures of the sub-region but also relative inequalities compared with other urban areas and regions of the UK and Europe. Between 1981 and 1991 employment declined steeply by 12.4 per cent and a further 5.4 per cent between 1991 and 1996; in this period employment replacement occurred but tended to be based in retail, hotels and construction (Dabinett, 2004, 2005). In contrast to the era of steel and manufacturing, with high paid, highly skilled jobs for life, new opportunities have invariably been more precarious and often based on part-time low-paid insecure contracts. In the last twenty years the growth in unemployment has not necessarily coincided with a relative increase in prosperity. The mid-term review of the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme, for instance, stated:

The South Yorkshire economy continues to struggle with issues of productivity, the stock of registered businesses, and the level of Gross Value Added in manufacturing. Productivity levels remain below that of the region in regards to the top ten South Yorkshire Employers.

(Leeds Metropolitan University and Sheffield Hallam University, 2003, p.17)

In relation to the employment or jobs gap that was at the centre of the 1999 submission for Objective 1 status, the Sheffield draft Employment Strategy prepared by the labour market think-tank the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) suggested that

to reach the current UK employment rate of 74.9%, Sheffield needs to assist 17,000 unemployed residents into jobs . . . if the current trend in the employment rate in Sheffield were to continue, this jobs gap would increase.

(CESI, 2005, p. 19)

Although levels of unemployment fell and employment increased within the area, this labour market performance also conceals a residual inactive labour force. There are significant numbers of claimants in the city-region, with the majority who are 'long term unemployed (South Yorkshire Partnership, 2006a). In 2006 the inactivity rate remained stubbornly higher than the British average, at 26 per cent compared with 22 nationally (ONS, 2006). Similarly, educational attainment has generally improved supported by national programmes to improve the quality of the labour supply but it still lags largely behind the more prosperous South East of England and is deeply divided between parts of the city-region. There is a high rate of people in the labour market with no qualifications, with people classed as economically inactive being particularly vulnerable (65 per cent possessing no qualifications whatsoever) (South Yorkshire Partnership, 2006a, p. 92). These key ingredients of the economic landscape provide an indication of the extent to which the Sheffield City Region struggled to 'fit' with a 'knowledge city-region' narrative (Jessop, 1997) that dominated the debate in the context the UK state's city-regional agenda.

### 3.5 Yorkshire Forward and the Regional Economic Strategy

The majority of accounts that have examined the insertion of the new RDAs into the fragmented political institutional landscape of the English regions have tended to represent the new regional bodies either as individual agencies or as a National collective. In line with a strategic relational perspective, this study incorporates a focus on the regional agency, Yorkshire Forward, as both object and subject of regulation in the relation with sub-regional actors. In particular, the research account takes as its starting point the agency's mechanisms and activities

concerned with first, the delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) in the post-2003 period following the provision of increased flexibility through the Single Pot; and second, the re-configuration of these arrangements in connection with the emergence of new city-regional partnerships in the region in the run up to the 2007 SNR (HM Treasury, 2007).

The new RDA set up in 1999 comprised a Board of 12 members; 4 allocated to local authorities' representatives, 5 to the private sector, 1 to the voluntary and community sector (VCS), one to the Trade Unions and one to the education sector. The sub-structure of the agency reflected two main influences. The first concerned the management requirements of the joining funding streams and structures (initially the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), the urban and regional regeneration functions of English Partnerships as well as those of the Rural Development Commission). The second referred to the functions of consultation and research around the RES and its delivery. This resulted in five main Directorates or Departments, each led by an Executive Director, with responsibilities for writing and following the delivery of different chapters of the RES. Directorates operated under the broad headings of Finance, Economic Inclusion, Environment, Business and Strategy, the latter leading in the development, delivery, review and evaluation of the RES and, subsequently, the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS). An ample majority of the staff employed by the agency had a public sector background, principally brought in from the joining structures (60 from English Partnerships, 33 from the Rural Development Commission and 63 from other regional development organisations) (Robson et al, 2000). This could alert us with respect to the consolidated public sector 'instinct' rooted within the agency with respect to private sector/civil society presence licensed through the agency's Board. In terms of institutional capacity, Yorkshire Forward was endowed with the second highest staff size (Robson et al., 2000) and budget among the English RDAs (DTI, 2005), an encouraging premise from the outset, but also one that should be assessed in relation to the extent of the gap between the level of direct institutional capacity granted to Yorkshire Forward and the scope of the regional processes the agency was charged with influencing. As



an indicative measure of this gap, in 2001 Yorkshire Forward controlled less than 1 per cent of total public spending in the region, equivalent to about 0.4 per cent of regional GDP (HM Treasury and DTI, 2001, p.6). In subsequent years, as suggested above, new responsibilities, additional resources and flexibilities accrued to the RDAs in a way that seemed to reflect as well as produce an increasing role in the regions. Despite this, as will be shown later in Chapter 6, doubts remained in relation to the extent of the impact of successive re-adjustments in terms intra-state relations (Harrison, 2006).

Understanding the evolution and shaping of Yorkshire Forward requires also a perspective on the agency's external relations. The institutional constraints that, especially in its early days, burdened the agency meant that its capacity to act depended in large part on the consent of other partners. The character and the scope of these interactions are therefore of primary importance. The form taken by these interactions was that of large-scale consultations with the myriad interest groups across the region that especially in the early phases of the RDA's life were crucial for forming consensus around the new agency in the process of preparation of the RES (Robson et al., 2000).

Thus the formulation of the RES was one of the most important initial tasks undertaken by the RDA. "Advancing Together: Towards a World Class Economy", sets out a vision for the region for the period 2000 to 2010 and was intended to constitute "a common framework of common priorities around which businesses, public agencies, voluntary groups and communities can focus their investment and effort" (Yorkshire Forward, 1999, p 5). Commensurate to the task, the RES vision was ambitious and wide-ranging, aiming at the creation of "a world-class, prosperous region that is sustainable, has empowered partnerships and communities, has a culture of enterprise and creativity, is self-reliant, has ladders of opportunity for all, and has a strong, positive identity" (p.5). Numerous analyses emphasised how the eight RESs were characterised by a number of homogeneous traits and traced the common influence of dominant economic development policy frameworks at national level and beyond (Robson et al., 2000; Painter, 2005). An economic development discourse ran through them that

referred to the challenges of the “global market place”, “knowledge driven economy”, and role of “innovation and enterprise” and information and communication technologies (in particular “e-business”, “e-skills”) and appeared also in successive versions of the YH’s RES (Yorkshire Forward, 1999; 2006)<sup>12</sup>. The extent of the new agency’s institutional constraints translated in a strategy making process that consisted in sampling existing policy repertoires (through extensive consultation), synthesising and casting them in the wider economic policy framework designed by central guidance. The result is a strategy that, abstaining from incorporating clear sectoral or spatial selectivities, acquired a generic, omni-comprehensive quality. An especially telling example of this is in the cluster strategy. Reflecting the terms dictated through the DTI guidance (DTI, 2001) on cluster development, cluster policy was at the core of the competitiveness strategy set out by the YH’s RES. In the original 1999 strategy, Yorkshire Forward identified five priority clusters: Digital Industries, Advanced Engineering and Metals, Chemicals, Bio-Science, Food and Drink. Two new clusters supplemented these in 2004: Health Care Technologies and Environmental Technologies. Although the difference between cluster strategy and sector targeting was explicitly recognised (p. 56), cluster definitions were so broad that this distinction appeared blurred. Furthermore the selected clusters reflected emerging activities that resonated with national priorities as well as the notable influence of pre-existing sectoral policies and established ‘sector based’ interests<sup>13</sup>. There appeared to be also a close association between selected cluster activities and sub-regional specialisms as throughout Yorkshire Forward’s documentation cluster targets are often identified with specific sub-regions: advance metals technology in SY, digital industries in WY and chemicals on the Humber (Peck and McGuinness, 2003). Although the

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<sup>12</sup>The YH RES was underlined by an interpretation of the lagging performance of the YH region that reflected the concerns of the Treasury and reflected in the five drivers of productivity framework (Yorkshire Forward, 2006, p. 35). This interpretation was framed by a representation of the national and international policy context that reflected the broad consensus about the role of the English regions within Europe and the international economy. A discourse constructed around “the challenge of globalization” and the stance of the YH region with respect to the economies of China, India, Brazil and Mexico was emphasized over and above its position in the national context (p.12).

<sup>13</sup>In particular, selected activities closely mirrored the 15 sectors identified in 1998/1999 in the context of the preparation of the Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) EU Programme by the RDA and the YH Regional Innovation Network.

cluster debate stresses the selectivity implicit in the evolution of cluster priorities across the UK regions, in order to create consensus between sub-regions and the interests of existing partnerships therein, Yorkshire Forward adopted a broad, inclusive approach, from both a sectoral and geographical point of view. The attempt to accommodate imperatives descending from the national policy framework and regional interests underpinned also the commitment to the potentially contradictory objectives of competitiveness, diversity and sustainability. In this respect, successive re-drafting of the RES functioned as effective instruments to maintain consensus and build (temporary) compromise. Additional statements and targets related to both social and environmental sustainability were added to the latest versions of the RES. There was however little evidence of that overhaul in strategic direction that would have been necessary to achieve them, suggesting that key tensions around economic and social objectives were far from being solved<sup>14</sup>.

For this study a focus on the RES and the process around its production as a symbolic, performative document aimed at the construction of consensus certainly carried a potential for enlightening some important aspects of the production of YH as a regional space for the governance of economic development. But the character of the RES itself also suggests that a critical challenge lay in the move from the phase of consensus building encapsulated in the RES to an inevitably complicated politics of action prioritisation in and across the region. These considerations underpinned the choice of focusing attention on the processes of sub-regional investment planning in YH.

### *3.6 The SRPs and the delivery of regional development*

Sub-regional investment planning was introduced in 2003, following the provision of increased financial flexibility to the RDAs' through Single Pot budgets. It was

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<sup>14</sup>A key example is to be found in the relation between the transport strategy outlined in the RES Objective 5 (p.79) and the carbon emission target.

based on four sub-regional partnerships (SRPs), tasked with drawing up investment plans for each sub-region. The purpose behind sub-regional investment plans was to coordinate Single Pot resources with a multitude of other economic development funds in order to maximise the impact of the RES (Yorkshire Forward, 2006).

As indicated in the previous section, the dynamics of investment planning involving the RDA and its sub-regional partners provide an apt lens through which to consider issues of political agency and contestation in the re-production of regions. In this context, as said in the previous chapter (section 3.2), it is important to move beyond uniform references to 'sub-regions' to consider the presence of a range of sub-regional arrangements and variegated interests and alliances coalescing in or across these in a fragmented region (cf. Harrison, 2008). To the extent that they reflected a functional logic related to their role in the delivery of the RES all the SRPs can be considered as 'spaces in themselves' (Cox, 1998). However, there is also a sense in which, endowed with significant levels of political and institutional capacity, sub-regional arrangements set up by local authorities in SY and the Humber prior to investment planning might approximate also to 'spaces-for-themselves'. This raises important questions in relation to their potential to perform as counter-weights to the agency in their areas<sup>15</sup>. For this reason beside a general picture of the RDA/SRPs dynamics, two sub-cases are selected for a more detailed examination of investment planning: the South Yorkshire Partnership (SYP) and the Humber Forum (HF). These consolidated arrangements encapsulated different representational regimes.

As indicated earlier (section 3.3) the HF had emerged as a voluntary partnership in 1993 to maintain a level of institutional and strategic capacity in economic planning in the area following the abolition of Humberside County Council. For the successive years its remit concerned the governance of economic regeneration initiatives centred on the Humber Ports, bringing together the new unitary

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<sup>15</sup>The four SRPs in YH shared some common characteristics that can be seen as descending from the RDA intervention in their set up. They all shared a basic structure that comprised a Leaders Group and an Officer Group coordinated by a small unit with staff seconded predominantly from the local authorities.

authorities of the former Humberside together with private sector representation in a formally constituted public-private partnership. Thus, in 2003 Yorkshire Forward's investment planning contributed to consolidate the existing initiative, including the establishment of a dedicated staff team. In relation to its representational regime, the HF reflected a greater balance of representation between state and non-state private sector, both at Board and Council level with respect to the other public sector dominated SRPs. Chaired by a private sector representative, the HF's Board included four elected leaders of the sub-regional local authorities and four private sector members, generally the Directors of large companies with a stake in the regeneration of the Humber Ports area. This was held accountable through the 'Council of Members' of over a hundred senior representatives of local private and public organisations.

The political processes that configured 'SY' as 'space in itself' as well as a 'space for itself' through the institutions endowed to the territory (the SY Forum and the Objective 1 Programme Directorate) are well documented in the literature on the governance of structural funds (Dabinett, 2005, 2010; Bache and Chapman, 2008; Armstrong and Wells, 2006). The allocation of EU Structural Funds was predicated on the premise that the sub-region had a shared and collective economic strategy that required support. This was not the case in the mid-1990s when initial moves were first made to gain Objective 1 designation. As a result, the four local authorities set up the SY Forum in 1997 to provide a voluntary-partnership vehicle to oversee the preparation of a shared vision and strategy for South Yorkshire. Later the partnership extended its membership to the private sector and the voluntary sector, and oversaw and sought to influence, the development of the Objective 1 Programme before a Programme Directorate, established by, and accountable to, Central Government (through the Government Office) (Bache and Chapman, 2008) was charged with its management. In 2003, Yorkshire Forward's investment planning revitalised the activity of the Forum (now re-branded as the SY Partnership). Here the major purpose behind the sub-regional investment plan was to ensure the coordination between the use of the regional Single Pot and Objective 1 expenditure. In terms of representational regime, the four local

authorities dominated the partnership that encompassed both the private sector and the VCS, with the latter in particular playing a significant role in the investment planning proceedings. Since the mid-1990s 'community economic development' (CED) had been a key component of regeneration programmes in the region such as the Single Regeneration Budget and Structural Funds. In SY in particular, the CED component of the Objective 1 Programme had not only funded many projects, it had also developed the political power of the VCS, one focused on ensuring future funding (Armstrong and Wells, 2006).

In contrast SRPs in WY and NY were relatively less developed. In the case of the former, the WY Partnership (WYP), the experience of inter-borough collaboration had been more sporadic and investment planning provided the key drive to confer a more sub-regional scope to the disjointed networks therein. In the case of the NY Partnership (NYP) the experience of partnership working around the delivery of EU Structural Funds programmes had been more fragmented. Furthermore, in contrast with the SY Metropolitan authorities, the NYP encapsulated a coalition of small rural authorities where the scale of the economic development resources available was relatively minor. All these circumstance contributed to a less developed emphasis on sub-regional working in the area.

In 2006, Yorkshire Forward started a process to review its investment planning arrangements with the aim of addressing the increasing gap between strategy and delivery. This process was also set to shape Yorkshire Forward's response to the emerging city-region agenda. It is therefore an apposite time to explore the re-positioning of the RDA vis-à-vis sub-regional actors and further explore the theme around contested regionalism based on a struggle between the RDA with local and sub-regional policy actors.

### 3.7 Actors and Ideas

As indicated in chapter 3 the SRA applied in this study emphasises the role of the personnel operating in and through state institutions, as well as, in line with an 'integral' understanding of state power, a potential variety of other agents located

close to or at a distance from the state apparatus. This calls for the consideration of the role of 'experts', consultants and other 'responsible' partners who partake with governmental institutions in the stakeholder and network-based arrangements that constitute the prevailing institutional format of the governance of regional and local economic development and regeneration (Crouch, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2005).

This approach substantiates an analytical focus on actors and organisations' ideas and their interplay with a shifting institutional context. This study incorporates Hay's (2004) notion that ideas operate as "points of mediation" (p.209) between actors and their context, as these interpret the latter and act upon it through ideational means. In particular, following Hay (2007), agency acts with interpretations and actions that are strategically selective towards particular contextual factors, 'strategic conduct', but where agents rely on perceptions of the latter context that are "at best incomplete" (p.63). In this interplay, contextual factors are strategically selective towards particular strategies, 'strategic context', as they offer particular forms of information for actors to interpret their environment. The reformulated strategic-relational approach applied here requires an additional specification. The role of well-developed ideas and intentional, strategic action should not be overemphasised at the expense of unintentional actions where there are no well thought ideas. This 'mudding through' requires that an examination of the politics of scalar/institutional restructurings should take account of inadvertent and competing ideas and actions (Fuller, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has made explicit the research methodology underlying this study. In considering the debate triggered by Markusen's critique of regional case study research it has highlighted the gap between methodological reflection and theoretical reformulation in regional research and traced the route through which bridging such gap could be bridged. Intensive single region case study research allows to grasp the multi-scalar and multi-dimensional connections theorised in

relation to the production of new regional state spaces. These could not be captured through 'chaotic conception'. The method of 'rational abstraction' allows regional geographers to establish the connections between the region and other scales, while maintaining the required sensitivity towards the unity and uniqueness of 'actually existing' regions.

The second part of the chapter has focused on the choice of the YH region and the Sheffield City Region as appropriate sites of research for considering the historically embedded nature of state spatial restructuring. The 'proximity' of the case study location has required a confrontation with Markusen's accusation that regional scholars tend to privilege research 'their own backyard'. In relation to this the chapter has explained why, despite its convenient location, the YH region and the Sheffield City Region remained ideal location for this research. Considering the peculiar economic and political challenges that New Labour's regional policy faced in the YH region, it was argued that these challenges underline a case choice motivated by considerations related to its explanatory power with respect to the key theoretical dimensions and objects of interest in this study rather than the criterion of typicality. Finally the chapter has outlined constitutive dimensions of the case study, which are the actual spaces, initiatives, actors and institutions that object of focus in this regional research.



# 6. Researching Actors and Accounts in a Region in Transition

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We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, Section V

## 1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the decisions that shape the research methodology developed in this study to bring into focus the role of political agency and struggle in the formation and transformation of regional economic governance in YH. It is designed to help the reader understand 'how' I arrived at my insights on the processes involved. Qualitative research has traditionally been accused of a lack of transparency with respect to its underlying methodological choices and, as a consequence, of effectively discouraging a thorough scrutiny of the rigour and validity of those self-same choices (Markusen, 2003). Through this chapter I attempt to address these potential weaknesses by opening up the research process and providing a clear account of the choices, and their underlying rationales, that have shaped it. Furthermore, I attempt to move beyond a strictly descriptive account of the actions taken during the fieldwork by way of being reflexive about the theoretically informed, yet also intrinsically pragmatic, choices that were made.

This study makes use of use of semi-structured interviews as the principal strategy to trace the interconnected sets of practices that materially constitute the process of governance rescaling in the case region. In relation to this, I discuss in detail my

experience of 'being in the field'. I 'open up' the processes of sampling research participants, establishing field relations and transforming available contacts into meaningful informants through interview techniques. I proceed then to describe the use I make of documentary and observational material to complement the interview data and expose the intellectual processes involved in 'generating findings' from the evidence collected. I conclude with some reflections on the lessons learned through the research process.

## **2. (Re-)developing the research strategy**

This section provides a reflective account of the development of the research strategy. In illustrating the choices that underpin the latter this account conveys the way in which continuous adaptation was required to respond to unexpected directions and surprising insights emerging in a highly mobile research environment.

### **2.1. Setting up the study**

The reformulated SRA applied in this study requires the adoption of 'in situ' strategies of enquiry capable of capturing the state as a 'peopled' organisation and the political struggles that decree the success or failure of a rescaling 'project'. Semi-structured interviews are the principal source of evidence for this study as they represent the most apt research strategy to keep the agents of state restructuring, and their various forms of agency, firmly in sight, close enough for the researcher "to see the whites of the protagonists' eyes"(Peck, 2010, p.1).

Documentary evidence and archived material was used to complement the material from semi-structured interviews. Although not always easy to get hold of, documentary evidence is an important source for analysing the discourses actors present to others, as well as some indication of historical decision-making process. Minutes of meetings were particularly useful sources for 'filling gaps' in relation to

the more proximate events in particular in relation to the unfolding city-regional trajectory under examination. The majority of these were sourced through the Internet.

At the outset, my intention was to disaggregate the state further, considering its embodiment in the individual brokers, officials and politicians in a way attuned to calls within the SRA to acknowledge and account more for the interpenetration of the state with the private status and spaces of actors (Jeffrey, 2000). The extent to which I could proceed along this avenue was limited by the degree and form of access granted that re-shaped the research agenda somewhat. It was initially hoped that interviews and documentary evidence would be supplemented with a period of embedded observation of one or more governance organisations in the region.

This was to allow for a 'submerged' analysis to bring out the deeper levels of decision-making and organisational cultures. Although there are some problems associated with this approach, in relation to ethics and positionality, it would have allowed an opportunity to access the "intimacy" (Jeffrey, p.1033) of governance institutions, effectively getting 'under the skin' of the issues I planned to explore. However I was unable to persuade individuals or organisations to grant me this level of access. What I was able to do was to be invited to a range of meetings and events. A list of events I participated can be found in Annex 3.

## 2.2 Identifying the most appropriate method(s) for the thesis

Observation in the context of various regional and city-regional events and meetings proved particularly useful and it provided a sense of the power dynamics involved in the negotiations and interaction between regional governance players around specific issues. In particular, some important subtleties could be captured to integrate evidence from other sources through the attendance of 'insiders events' that took place behind close doors. Attendance at workshop and consultation events also provided a means of viewing discussions of policy from

outside the 'inner circle' of governing actors. These events were particularly useful for informal discussions with various people to probe around some of the research questions I was dealing with. They were not, however, ideal for directing the shape of discussions to specifically deal with the issues I was interesting in exploring.

Semi-structured interview techniques constituted the principal investigative tool of this research. They provided a ductile instrument for uncovering the factors behind individual and organisational selection of a particular course of action and in particular for bringing out the relation between context and action in the determination of a particular outcome. To make the most of the potential of interviews for my research, I adopted a non-standardised questionnaire of flexible, open-ended questions that permit an interaction between the interviewer and respondent. The questionnaires were tailored to the specific respondent, with a common range of questions directed at actors with similar positions within an organization.

Interviews presented specific advantages compared to other techniques for this study. The clearest advantage, as suggested in the previous section related is that this strategy involves a 'first-hand' contact with those actors 'acting in and through the state' and whose interactions shape processes of state restructuring in the specific area under examination. While documents and other sources may provide detailed accounts, this can hardly be a substitute for a strategy that allows the researcher to 'seeing the whites of the eyes' of the protagonists of the process of interest (Peck, 2010). The nature of semi-structured interviewing also allowed probing my subjects, this type of interaction offered the chance to move beyond written accounts (official versions and narratives forming regional and sub-regional strategies) to explore the underlying context, the informal processes and perceptions that preceded those decisions. Furthermore, as the regional governance arena is inundated with an abundance of documentation in the form of all sorts of strategies and reviews, interviews helped me to cut through this surplus of data as respondents could often assist me in identifying the most significant documents from those that may be marginal to my research.

There are limitations and weaknesses associated with interview techniques. For example, interviewees can misrepresent their own and others' positions in ways that raise questions over the reliability of their statements (Clark, 1998)<sup>16</sup>. In particular, interviews with decision-makers present the danger that they are more competent at capturing the agenda, leading the discussion and presenting persuasive arguments with the researchers unwittingly "transformed into the carrier of 'expert' insights to the outside world" (Cochrane, 1998, p.2125). Serious issues of reliability were brought into focus in relation to the celebratory tone of some new regionalist accounts that appeared to reflect exclusively the view of 'winners' while failing to convey more complex realities often involving unequal power relations and exploitation (Hadjiamichalis, 2006). As I will explain more in detail in the next section, for example, efforts were made to build a multi-layered sample of informants in order to facilitate the triangulation of significant data points. A range of voices, from within, of the margins of, or outside the state apparatus are reflected in the research account.

In general, one way of overcoming the limitations of a research method is to supplement its use with different methods that can complement the data collection process. As Denzin (1970, p. 308) argues, the limitations of one method are often the strengths of another, allowing researchers who mix their approach to achieve the benefits of each while overcoming some of their deficiencies. I elected to undertake a limited amount of documentary analysis to supplement my interview data<sup>17</sup>. The emphasis is placed not on documents produced at the request of the researcher but instead on primary sources of data that exist regardless of whether the research is ongoing or not. They record or relate to some aspect of the social world and can assist in understanding the chronological flow of events and social interactions (Bryman, 2004, p. 381). Documentary analysis as a method differs from the practice of literature reviewing as the material it generates can be used to supplement findings and support the arguments of the research.

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<sup>16</sup>Also, George and Bennett (2005) noted that policy-makers have an incentive to slant their accounts in order to portray a careful, multi-dimensioned process of policymaking to the public.

<sup>17</sup> These are listed in the Bibliography and referenced in the conventional manner.

Two main strategies were used to identify relevant documentation. Firstly, I accessed documents such as reports, reviews, minutes of meetings or presentations that were publicly available through the official websites of the different agencies. Secondly, I included a request for further documentation or sources of information at the conclusion of each interview. This elicited few responses, though one local authority interviewee sent me various presentations --Sheffield City Region Forum that had been given by consultants or internal members. These documents were not freely available in the public domain but the participant was happy for its content to be used to cross-reference and supplement the account he had provided in an interview. In other cases information made available while pertinent to the wider context and critical to ---, not all of this information necessarily possessed the qualities or explanatory power I was seeking. To overcome such concerns, Scott (1990) poses four criteria assessing the worth of documentary research relating to the authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning conveyed by the document.

In terms of authenticity, all the documents were of what Bryman (2004, p. 381) describes as "unquestionable origin". They were either provided directly by respondents as representations of their reality and therefore endorsed by them, or 'sponsored' by the official organisation's website that makes these documents freely available to all. Similarly, the credibility of the evidence in terms of distortion and bias did not provoke any major concerns. Indeed, when conducting documentary analysis such evidence can be interesting precisely because of the biases that they reveal: the danger may only be posed by the extent to which the meaning they convey is a true depiction of reality (Bryman, 2004, p. 387).

It is with these issues that the criteria related to representativeness and meaning are concerned, questioning both whether the evidence is representative and typical of its kind and whether the meaning it conveys is clear, comprehensible and above all placed in context. The danger, for example, of using minutes of meetings is that they are removed from the context to which they refer. Minutes include highly summarised, partial accounts of a meeting in that often are intended to reflect positively on the participants. I was therefore extremely selective about

the material used from these resources and the extent to which I represented them as a true depiction of reality. In the end, although I have considered the material used representative of the context it was placed in, as corroborated by data generated from my interviews, I have used minutes of meetings sparingly. This has been to reinforce rather than shape the arguments of the thesis, for example by adding some chronological flow to events that occurred outside the time frame of my interviews or to provide comparison with primary data generated from interviews.

### 2.3 The process of identifying a sample

In total, interviews were carried out with 38 people working within regional organisations, local authorities and other stakeholders from the private and voluntary sector across the case study region (an anonymised list of interviewees can be found in Annex 1). The majority of the interviews for this study were conducted during a period of 11 months from November 2006 to September 2007. Three exploratory interviews were conducted prior to this, in September 2006. Finally, three follow up interviews were conducted in December 2007.

The sampling procedure adopted as part of my data collection strategy configured as a recursive process of discovery, questioning and further sampling. It brought together aspects of purposive sampling with theoretical, 'opportunistic' and snowballing sampling. However, as I will explain later, this is less the result of a concern to apply specific procedures as codified in the methodological literature than of a need to develop a flexible approach capable of adapting to a research field in continuous transformation. When I opted for semi-structured interviews as principal research tool, I drew some general sampling criteria to assist me in recruiting my informants. I carried out a set of exploratory interviews with three 'professionals' (two university professors and one private consultant) who were, or had been in the past, involved in regional development activities and organisations. These 'dialogues' not only assisted me in gaining a level of confidence in relation a

relatively 'small' political world such as that of YH, they also, provided key leads in terms of where and how to locate myself in order to obtain a rich pool of data. For example, the initial idea was to concentrate the analytic focus on the interactions taking place around the process of formation of the RES would provide an apt lens through which bring into focus the contested production of the regional economic space. These preliminary interviews led to refocus analytic attention on the processes of delivery of the RES in the context of the investment planning framework. The new general sampling criterion therefore was centre on the actors with a stake in the definition and functioning of investment planning. The process of recruitment developed from extensive background research that included visiting websites, reading minutes of meetings of the SRPs and consulting lists of participants to key regional events attended by economic development professionals from 2002 throughout the successive years. Alongside those directly involved in the processes (Yorkshire Forward, local authorities and other 'legitimised' stakeholders) and those with a more indirect role (YH Regional Assembly, the Government Office for YH and private consultants), I sought an engagement with a further group of organisations and actors. In order to throw into relief the boundaries of networks and coalitions I actively sought out for the less well-represented groups and individuals engaging with activists' networks and small voluntary and community groups at the margins of formal infrastructures of representation. The second step in the definition of my research sample involved the recruitment of governance players engaged in the formation of expanded partnership around the Sheffield City Region. The Government Office for YH was well placed to provide an overview of the circumstances in which the city-regional agenda was developed in region. I conducted an explorative interview with the policy manager that, through the analysis of relevant documents, was identified as being in charge overseeing the development of the agenda in YH. This encounter paved the way also to the identification and recruitment of a number of additional key informants beside those I had already identified through the documentary resources available and previous interviews. The Sheffield city-region at the time of the fieldwork was under construction, snowballing revealed as particularly apt



for sampling research participants in these fast-changing circumstances. I was referred from my Government Office informant to the policy officer that in the meantime had been seconded to the role of 'city-regional coordinator' and through further snowballing my initial purposive sample (Chief Executives and Leaders of city-regional local authorities) was complemented to include an additional sample of local (and sub-regional) economic development officers that had performed an important brokering role in channelling different interests coalescing around the city-region. Cascading contacts across and through each organisation using support and information from some 'champions' and other key informants offered me a level of access into subtleties of the different actors' roles beyond their formal job titles.

More in general, reflecting the proximity of the research to events under scrutiny, the sampling process took an iterative form where the 'original' sample of interviewees was subject to continuous updates and modification following first, emergent relevant directions for research from preliminary analytic work; second, the rise of unforeseen opportunities, such as encounters and events.

As indicated above, as I collected the data, I simultaneously engaged in some preliminary analytical activity. In this way, as new relevant directions emerged I was led to further explore them through the collection of additional instances of data. Besides the continuous updating of interview guides for future interviews, I was also led to identify new sources of evidence in the form of additional informants or/and new documents that became available successively. In the literature, this recursive data collection methodology, directed by evolving research dimensions is associated with theoretical sampling strategies and contraposed to selective sampling. The latter refers to decisions made prior to beginning a study to sample subjects according to a preconceived initial set of criteria. Theoretical sampling on the other hand, refers to a sampling decision made on analytic grounds developed in the course of a study (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). However, as reflected in the account above, my choices during the fieldwork were not guided only by pure theoretical considerations. The regional governance landscape interactions is not a clearly demarcated territory but a complex tangled set of

social relations 'in flux' that cannot be read off from 'maps' of organizational structures and processes. My final research sample attempted to reflect this reality through snowballing and 'opportunistic' sampling. If adopting a flexible approach allowed me to mould the sample around the fieldwork context as this unfolded, proceeding in this way, constantly pacing and monitoring the quality of data becomes particularly important. I found that decisions needed to be made to restrict the numbers of informants from particular directions, selecting specific participants and encouraging them, while aiming to reduce bias caused by keen respondents or those apparently avoiding engagement. For example, an effort was made to seek out far less well-represented groups and individuals by including small voluntary and community groups at the margins or outside the governance apparatus.

Rather than adopting a specific strategy as codified in the methodological literature, maintaining a degree of adaptability and creativity was key in the design of a sampling strategy that could be as reactive as possible to a research environment 'in flux'.

#### 2.4 Getting access and establishing field relations

The rise of semi-autonomous regional governance structures, allied to a 'democratic deficit' (Harrison, 2006) was connected to the rise of a regional policy elite often untouched by democratic or popular scrutiny (Lovering, 1999). This should not necessarily be taken as a normative statement; nonetheless the last decade witnessed a growing body of influential people with little outside understanding as to their roles, strategic decision-making or motivational forces.

From the outset of my fieldwork I was conscious of the difficulties entailed in recruiting informants for my research. Indeed, interviews conducted with elites<sup>18</sup> are often portrayed in the literature as presenting additional challenges for

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<sup>18</sup>Broadly defined as "an informant ... who occupies a senior or middle management position; has functional responsibility ... has considerable industry experience and ... possesses a broad network of personal [and

researchers. Access here needs to be negotiated against the inflexibilities of public or corporate bureaucracy, with some going so far as to suggest that the establishment of barriers to keep other members of society out is in itself what defines a group as an elite (Hertz and Imber, 1993). Difficulties in obtaining access to such players are also related to the substantial nature of the elite, especially his/her personality: close, insecure, arrogant or self-important. This, for example, is the experience of Schoenberger (1991, p.183) of the “busy manager, prone to being interrupted and preoccupied with the exigencies of his or her job”. Issues of power and status between elite actors and researchers appear to be at the root of the problems commonly associated with studying elites. In my experience capturing the voices of those on the margins of the governance apparatus, such as small community groups leaders and voluntary sector organisations representatives proved as challenging as accessing senior members of local councils or executives of regional organisations. For Smith (2006) the idea that elites are intrinsically more challenging to access becomes more difficult to defend when adopting a more fluid and less structural conceptualization of power. Furthermore, authority within a field or organization does not necessarily transmit to the interview setting. The particular temporal conjuncture in which the research activities were carried out was associated with increased perceived vulnerability on the part of governance actors, in relation to their authority over powers and resources. In this conjuncture the policy process remained highly sensitive causing inter-organisational relations to fluctuate around a state of continual disequilibrium. Rather than inhibiting elites' participation, uncertainty in many cases, seemed to be associated with the informants' increased perception that the researcher could assist them in making their voice heard while also providing useful information in the process. This was more evident in the case of the YH Regional Assembly and its personnel. For the latter, taking part in research project in the run up to the 2007 SNR seemed to configure as part of a wider endeavour to justify its existence to the outside world. These considerations echo the argument of Ward and Jones (1999) that the temporal conjuncture in which the researcher enters the field

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professional] relationships” (Welch *et al.*, 2002 p. 614).

timing plays a key role in the 'critical positioning' (following McDowell, 1992) of the researcher within the governance structures of local power, which is process-based and fluid. In other words, conducting research on a topic that is sensitive at a particular time with reference to particular tiers of government presents divergent problems (or opportunities as in the case of this study) in terms of access to certain type of information and the range of informants.

One implication of this is that producing some kind of prescriptive account of approaching research on elites would prove unhelpful and misleading (Smith, 2006). Despite lots of careful preparation, I cannot help feeling that accessing my informants configured more like a precarious, on-going and implicit bargaining process influenced by contextual factors beyond my control than as an accomplished plan. However, I also believe that luck and chance in the research process need to be encouraged by the actions of the researcher. In what follows I refer to the practical measures I have taken in order to reach the aimed level of access to my research subjects.

For a start, I always emailed my proposals directly to my potential interviewees. The email contained a brief presentation, including information about myself, the scope of the interview and, when possible, I tried to refer to some commonalities, a common context ("we met at xxx", "xxxx suggested you would be able to help"; "I have already discussed these issues with ..." etc). I tended to avoid the use of academic language as much as possible and went straight for the facts<sup>19</sup>. If I did not get a reply to my e-mail in the subsequent three or four days I contacted the potential interviewee's office by phone. I kept a log of my conversations and messages left for individuals and when the individuals contacted did not reply to an email or return my subsequent call, I persisted, leaving a second, third, or even a fourth message at appropriate time intervals. In these circumstances I learned how relations with gatekeepers sometimes are more important than relations with their superiors. It was important to stand out as many of my interviewees received

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<sup>19</sup>Buchanan et. al. (1988) go as far as suggesting that terms such as 'research', 'interview,' and 'publish' should be avoided since these words carry strong negative connotations which could dampen any potential enthusiasm for consenting to an interview.

numerous requests for interviews from students and researchers. Being a foreigner certainly assisted in creating an informal contact with gatekeepers. I was often questioned about the origins of my name, which generally led to a small conversation about my home country. Although being persistent was certainly important in obtaining access to politicians and top public managers, it was equally important to be pragmatic and able to recognise when to turn to alternative sources. For example, in consideration of its national and regional profile and certainly busy schedule, I was aware that the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council would probably be the hardest informant to reach. Nevertheless I contacted his office and asked for an interview. The Chief Executive's personal assistant reacted with a laugh to my request. While somewhat unprofessional, it was also a spontaneous reaction that signalled that there was not much room to negotiate access. I remarked on this in a jokey way and, in an attempt to remedy she asked me about the specific purpose of my interview and, after having consulted various people, she addressed me to the policy manager that worked closely with the Chief Executive in developing the council's agenda on the city-region. This particular interview revealed important aspects with regard to the significance of role of the Chief Executive in a way that the Chief Executive himself probably would not have allowed me to access.

However I question the extent to which such practical measures would have been as effective in gaining me access to key informants without the further assistance of key 'allies'. An important part of the fieldwork preparatory learning process involved becoming familiar with the context. This, in turn, entailed gathering information on the people and the setting through available literature. If this 'homework' stage was important, now I feel I probably prolonged it beyond usefulness. After all, access cannot be gained without going out and making first hand contacts with people. A crucial step of the preparatory stage involved identifying a handful of informants that could provide me with general and reflective knowledge to share, useful to access key governance processes and players. Through dialogues with colleagues that had already worked in the field, including my supervisors, I identified three informants, with a potential to fulfil this

role. These initial contacts provided me with significant assistance ranging from relevant information to the access to some important networks. For example, an interview with one of these informants, a private consultant, led to an invite to attend a consultation event he had organised, and, once there, he introduced me to a number of attendees. Gaining access to an insiders' event and 'sponsorship' from a well-respected professional paved the way for 'building up' my credentials with other informants in the sub-region. This indicates the importance to actively seek and make use of 'allies' to get and to ensure continued of access (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The role of a Government Office senior executive was crucial for granting the desired level of access to the senior management of Yorkshire Forward. Some of these agents had previously proved very hard to reach as I was unable to get beyond a veil of personal assistants and secretaries and confronted with a long waiting list. When I reformulated my request making use of the authority of my Government Office 'ally' as a benchmark of my credentials, I was able to act on the way the way secretaries perceived my request and obtain an interview in the subsequent weeks. The informant himself made reference during the interview to our "common contact" within the Government Office, revealing that the information had been passed on to open the way for the interview. In other cases, the role of my 'ally' took the form of a more direct sponsorship through the offer of phoning directly some informants on the Sheffield City Region to grant me access.

Reflecting on the modality of access in the field can reveal important insights about research subjects. Some researchers have stressed how the process of gaining access constitute itself a key part of the data collection (Morrill et al, 1999). In relation to the institutional landscape under examination, for example, the key role of Government Office officials in facilitating access to other regional and sub-regional actors reflected their influential position within the regional governance network. In contrast, as suggested above, the RDA was the main source of refusals and also of people continually cancelling and asking to re-organise meetings. While the issues related to workloads used as a justification might have played a role, this reflects also a sense of a 'closed shop' given off by some

representatives of the RDA and feeds into to some of the issues discussed throughout the rest of this research account.

A signal that I had reached a satisfactory level of access, in the final phases of my fieldwork, I was referred to as a source of information by some of my original informants to another researcher interested in investigating similar issues in the YH region.

### 2.5 Transforming contacts into meaningful informants

Meeting with informants does not necessarily imply having access to them. The process of gaining access often extended to the opening phase of the interview into the first set of questions. Indeed, the general atmosphere of the interview was set by the very first minutes spent with the informant, the moment of the introduction and the first exchange in the form of 'small talk'. Even if I had already done this by email or by phone, I always briefly re-introduced my project and myself. I extended this climate-setting phase to the first question, usually a formality used as a warm up to the interview, if time and frames allowed it. It is certainly a consolidated journalistic strategy to move progressively from non-threatening to the more threatening questions. In my experience question order proved important for substantive reasons and as a means of gaining rapport. The latter was facilitated by innocuous questions about the person's background as my interviewees, as most people, seemed especially fond of talking about themselves. Before asking more sensitive questions that might involve the respondent to refer to, for example, disagreements between partners, modalities of informal negotiations, I usually waited until the middle or the end of the interview while making sure to have enough time to explore the topic. I always started asking the interviewee for a 'grand tour', for example, "can you describe me the functioning of investment planning?". The major benefit of this type of question is that it gets the respondent talking while maintaining him/her focused on the subject of the interview. From there I proceeded to ask for more details and, in this context I

often made use of 'example questions' to obtain an illustration of a situation identified by the respondent.

As suggested earlier my initial, somewhat naïve, idea was to structure the fieldwork in two distinct phases (one concerning regional investment planning and the other the attempt to expand sub-regional partnerships around the wider city-region) and construct three different interview plans, one for the regional, one for sub-regional and one for the 'general' informants. As I progressed into the field, interview plans were recursively reworked to reflect the complex nature of shifting multi-scalar governance inter-relations. Furthermore, the groups of informants largely overlapped and offered relevant material in relation to both set of governance events under scrutiny.

Annex2 is a brief summary of the topic guides which were used to focus most of the interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, and were of course personalised for each area. In line with the advantages identified to interviews in section 2. of this Chapter, a great deal of what Bryman (1998) calls "rambling" took place, where those interviewed moved on to related subjects that were of relevance to them, or remembered relevant anecdotes. On that basis, the guides are no more than that, a guide to the topic intended to be discussed at the outset.

As I understood more about governance actors and practices in the region my confidence grew and the format of my interviews changed. In early encounters I carried quantities of photocopies, notes and long lists of pre-arranged questions. If this representation of myself as a zealous researcher may have helped my confidence it was not necessarily of any practical use. By the later interviews increased social fluency allowed me to travel light to my interview locations and use a schedule that amounted to little more than approximately five/six topic titles and some background information. Increased social fluency produced better interviews. Inexperience and the associated lack of calm and confidence diluted the potential of open-ended questions in the initial phase of my fieldwork. During the transcription of the first interviews I realised how I often failed to follow up on potentially important issues. At the root of this was my inability to calibrate the balance between a space for improvisation and a degree of control on the



interview. The key to address this was through the development of a better capacity to listen to the interviewees. Listening is a crucial form of activity (Faimberg, 1996) and requires as necessary condition a calm and confident state of mind. This, in turn, could only be generated through increased familiarity with the field.

Despite my growing confidence, many of my informants had extensive experience of being interviewed by students and researchers. Moreover, most of them performed roles that required a natural capacity to communicate, interact and leading negotiations towards preferred aims. If on the one hand, good interpersonal and communication skills helped put me at ease, they sometimes also made it difficult to access information I was interested in, protected through a barrier of rhetoric and formalised answers. Using 'soft' strategies, grand tour questions and probes, often proved ineffective to stimulate discussion and interest and I was provided with 'tourist' explanations. In these circumstances it was often useful to frame the issue under discussion in terms that personalise it. Psychologically separating the respondent from the institution he/she belonged to ("what do you think personally?") sometimes could assist in getting beyond stock organizational answers. In other circumstances, often out of a sense of frustration, I adopted 'hard' strategies, for example, by surprising the informant with contradictory contra-questions or referring, while respecting confidentiality, to the (negative) views expressed by other governance players on the interviewee's organization. This kind of strategy however proved something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it often assisted me in circumventing the 'tourist' stance that often defines the way in which officials tend to communicate with the public (Welch et al., 2002) by surprising the respondent and acting on his/her perception of me as an insider and thus capable of grasping the real issues at hand. On the other hand, in other circumstances the same strategy led the respondent to question my use of the information disclosed during the interview and nullified my previous efforts to build a sense of trust.

Being, or at least being perceived as, an 'insider', is often regarded as the most advantageous position from where to elicit more detail from interview participants

(Hill-Collins, 1991; Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). As a relatively young, female, non-British researcher I shared little with the group of middle aged male officials and politicians that constituted the bulk of my informants or, in other words, I was the archetypal 'outsider'. As I conducted more interviews it became clear that my positionality rather than being fixed could often shift within the shared space of the interview. This happened in consideration of a number of factors that contributed to first, erase the insider-outsider dichotomy and second, invalidate the privileges normally associated with an insider perspective. For example, the researcher can often shift her/his positionality in a self-conscious way (McDowell, 1998). On some occasions I tended to play down the distance from my interviewee, on others I accentuated it (referring for example, to the difficulties in understanding the intricacies of regional governance as a foreigner). Herod (1999) documented how by 'playing up' ones' status as a foreigner and 'outsider' in relation the local political culture often brought considerable advantages. He describes in particular the unsuspected advantages gained by way of 'playing dumb' in interviews. In this respect the fact that my own identity was somewhat ambiguous, a foreigner affiliated to a local research institution, has given me the space to ask what were potentially challenging questions in a naive way that could be mistaken for ignorance. For instance, within this space I felt more comfortable in engaging in 'straight talk' with the informant.

While a researcher can have relative control over representations of nationality and its impact on the insider/outsider position, the impact of other visible signifiers of difference such as gender, class and age cannot be controlled. I cannot establish with certainty if and how visible gender and seniority gaps affected my respondent's perceptions. In my experience of interviewing senior male officials and politicians I often felt that the gender gap associated with a seniority gap induced a form of benevolent paternalism in my informants that in some circumstances translated in a form of effective sponsorship. This does not mean that this shared positional space was a stable one in some situation this power relation appeared inverted. This can be illustrated through the particular researcher-informants dynamics during a specific episode of fieldwork. In the

course of an event I attended a local authority leader, acting as champion and host introduced me to other officials in attendance as someone “doing research on the Sheffield City Region”. Following this introduction, I was approached by one of the chief executives who wanted to make sure that he was included in the list of people I planned to talk to for my research. Later, the chief executive of another authority joined the conversation who also showed an interest in knowing who I intended to consult and if he had been considered for an interview. A critical issue here, again, seems to be the political-temporal contingency of the research (Ward and Jones, 1999). As my research proceeded in a field in constant flux, uncertainty provided the opportunity to, somewhat cynically perhaps, capitalise on the increased perception of vulnerability of governance actors. If the proximity of the research to the events under examination has inevitably caused the research some practical complications it also made actors more easy to access and prone to engage in an exchange with the interviewee. It also necessarily affected how this voice was articulated in the interaction and the type of knowledge produced. Conditions significant institutional and political upheaval might have conditioned the nature of the responses and the extent to which the research account is inward looking. While these circumstances of this policy void might have contributed to the sensitivity of the research towards the tensions underlying the governance transition under study, but this means also that perhaps issues around which tensions were less developed or absent might have been underplayed in the research account.

### **3. The analytical process**

The aim of this section is to open a door on the intellectual processes involved in generating findings from the evidence collected while also considering the role of casual association in the mind of the researcher in the interpretation of the data. Some considerations on ethics and privacy in the research process are also included in this section.

### 3.1 Directing a dialogue between theory and data

While making clear the intellectual process involved in generating findings from the evidence collected requires inevitably to break down data analysis and interpretation in a series of steps it is necessary to convey how analysis involves intellectual craftsmanship. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005) data interpretation can be seen as an art form where moving from the field to the text to the reader, the researcher operates as bricoleur, translating what has been learned into a body of textual work that communicates these understandings to the reader.

As suggested earlier there was no clear separation in this research between the data collection and the analysis. Analysis of data began from the start of data collection. Documentary evidence was essentially analysed from the moment an initial scan of the text was made as decisions were made about the degree of relevance and significance of material. Interview material took a slightly more drawn-out process. Before a more formal analytical process was carried out, interviews had been analysed a number of times: responses were analysed during interviews, this is necessary in order to shape the further questioning, then from notes immediately after interviews to consider any particularly noticeable points or themes, then again during transcription<sup>20</sup>.

Once the interviews were transcribed they were read through as a whole and further comments applied to the text. A further level of analysis was reached through the use of NVivo qualitative data software. This involved the thematic categorisation of data, documentary and interview material, across a number of categories that had been previously identified as well as new ones that emerged re-reading the data. This categorization assisted me in starting working with the data, testing out theories and themes I had developed reading through the text by way of simply summarising data and seeing how much material was available in

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<sup>20</sup>All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in full. One of the recordings was unusable due to a technical problem and in this case I made use of the notes taken during the interview.

support of these. This led to some re-shaping of my thinking and re-orienting some of the focal points of the research.

A final form of categorisation of the data was accomplished in the terms of classifying the type of data across the various themes. This configured as a heuristic exercise to identify the processes concerned with a 'politics of scale' on the one hand and the more prosaic 'non-strategic' day-to-day politics of governance on the other. The route followed here recognises the "partly discursive" (Fairclough, 2005, p.7) nature of text and the working of 'discourses' and 'ideas' beyond 'facts' or 'events'. As mentioned in chapter 4 (section 3.7), Hay's (2004, p.209) notion that ideas perform as "point of mediation" between actors and their context, as these interpret the latter and act upon it through ideational means, was particularly important in guiding the exploration of competing interpretations of emergent governance tensions. This study, following Hay's (2007), conceives agency as acting with interpretations and actions that are strategically selective towards particular contextual factors, 'strategic conduct', but where agents rely on perceptions of the latter context that are "at best incomplete" (p.63). Within this interdependent relationship contextual factors are strategically selective towards particular strategies, 'strategic context', as they offer particular forms of information for actors to interpret their environment. The reformulated strategic-relational approach applied here called for an additional degree of cautiousness, resisting the temptation to emphasise well-developed ideas and intentional strategic action, at the expenses of unintentional action where there are no well thought out ideas. In order to incorporate a level of sensitivity towards this 'muddling through', examination of the politics of scalar/institutional restructurings should take account of inadvertent and competing ideas and actions (Fuller, 2010). In this research documentary evidence and interviews were analysed for the competing framings of governance issues that underpin different actors' endeavours to (re-)shape material arrangements in a way that is apt for reaching their desired outcomes. This is explored in most depth in chapter 7 and 8.

### 3.2 Linking analysis to interpretation through writing up

Writing-up was a particularly important as a process for linking analysis and interpretation. From early on, short memo writing, in the form often of short papers for my supervisors, allowed me to experiment different ways to relate components of the preliminary theoretical framework to the data and to re-focus the on-going data collection by highlighting gaps/contradictions. At more advanced stages, through the writing longer memos, also in the form of presentation at conferences and papers prepared for publication, thoughts on themes and analysis were further developed. These written texts also allowed to elicit feedback from people not directly involved in the research, such as conference delegates and peers, which proved critical in working towards the final analysis.

### 3.3 On ethics and confidentiality

At the outset of this research I committed to design and carry out an ethical study. Moreover, considering the potentially political sensitive nature of the context and specific issues investigated, I chose to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity to my research participants. Having considered, perhaps in a rather superficial manner, these issues did not prevent the emergence of some hasty ethical judgements during the research process. With hindsight, I could have been better prepared from the outset by thinking about the kinds of ethical issues that might have arisen in relation to the specificities of my research project. Whilst I could not have been able to anticipate them, it would have helped me ensuring I was thinking and acting in ethically principled way even in the face of the unexpected. My particular stance with respect to ethical issues at the start of my research was strongly influenced by the assumptions I held in relation to power dynamics in the context of the elite and expert interviews. Generally, issues of ethics and confidentiality are not usually thoroughly discussed in studies that make use of elite and professional interviews where relations are seen as being more balanced

or skewed in favour of the interviewee (Mason, 2002). In fact, as explained before, in my experience power dynamics proved more complex and some ethical issues emerged in the course of the study.

At its most basic level perhaps, designing ethical research requires being honest about the purposes of the research and engaging with the wider context in which the research is being conducted this requires thinking about the range of interests involved and what implications research findings may have on them. Building trust and reassuring participants that I was 'trustable' was a key to good field relationships. Moreover, as illustrated before, in building rapport, I relied on impression management. So, questions emerge with respect to striking a balance between trust and some kind of deception. Should I have been explicit about all the component dimensions of my positionality? Should I have come clean, for example, about the political undertones of my theoretical approach? There is no single right answer to these questions but in my specific research experience, a degree of strategic deception was not only inevitable, it was necessary, matching the 'closed' nature, invisible to the public gaze, nature of many of the governance organisations and mechanisms I encountered. Within the critical research paradigm adopted through this research in particular, I argue, a degree of deception is somewhat endemic as it takes the researcher out of the participants' world, at necessary distance from the 'protagonists' of the political economic processes under examination. Another important area for concern was how to reference data gained from interviews. In advance of carrying out interviews, respondents were contacted in writing to make sure they agreed for their interview to be recorded and for materials to be used in my thesis and later publications. This involved the agreement that job titles and names would be anonymised. Specific organisations have been referred where necessary to provide context to the statement. With regard to the issue of privacy, none of my respondents had problems in being tape-recorded, however, some respondents agreed to go on record to an extent. Indeed, in some instances I found that I had a reasonably open, taped interview, followed by a number of off-tape remarks more important than anything previously said. Such instances highlighted the importance of being

able to scribble these remarks down, once out of eyeshot, and then record them. I then proceeded to evaluate, case by case how to make the best use of the remark while protecting the privacy of my informant and avoiding treating the information casually. Respondents were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts, although in practice only one took up this offer.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have provided a reflective account of the process of carrying out the research. I have illustrated the choices that have shaped the research strategy and conveyed how I often came to re-adapt this strategy to respond to unexpected directions and surprising insights emerging in a highly mobile research environment. I exposed the intellectual processes entailed in the generation of findings while also highlighting the role of casual association in the mind of the researcher in the interpretation of the data. Inevitably the knowledge produced was affected by my specific positionality as a 'localised foreigner'.

Methodology texts often convey the idea of a linear research path that articulates in clearly demarcated constituent stages. It starts from a research interest, moves on to literature review, methodology, data collection and analysis, and ends with the conclusion. In hindsight, the progression of my thesis' knowledge production was anything but a linear process with a clear demarcation between methodology and theory. As my familiarity with the literature progressed it impacted on my research questions and on my data collection. Conversely, the data I collected and analysed also influenced my theoretical positioning. My own research experience therefore describes a complex and cyclical process of knowledge production in which theory and methodology are in a constant two-way dialogue. The iterative character of this process can undoubtedly lead to a sense of confusion and a related sense of uncertainty. However, as captured in the opening quote of this chapter, such confusion and uncertainty should be seen as fundamental methodological components of a PhD, providing critical and reflective spaces in the research process.



The next chapter moves on from the process of 'setting up' the study. Before turning to analysis of the evidence gathered through the different techniques discussed above, Chapter 6 reviews existing analytic perspectives on New Labour regional policy as a process of 'centrally orchestrated regionalism' (Harrison, 2008).

# 7. Shaping the region: the impact of the RDA on the sub-regions

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## 1. Introduction

Chapter 4 outlined the process of so-called 'state-led decentralisation' behind the production of the RDAs in England and the way this worked to reduce the new regional agencies to weak instruments for advancing the government's policies in the regions, rather than the regional economic powerhouses advocated by regionalists.

The question of the impact this has on other scalar relationships has generally been narrowly framed in terms of whether state intervention, having successfully defeated the regional campaign for increased powers to be ceded from the state, will sanction the further up-scaling of resources and power from the local state to generate economic growth (Harrison, 2008). In this and other accounts, RDAs tend to be treated either as a national collective, emphasising structure or as individual regional agencies, emphasising agency. To date, only limited attempts have been made to analyse 'how' state functions are attacked, defended, and up-scaled through RDAs themselves. This chapter integrates established perspectives on the state and the region, focusing on the struggles that emerged following the establishment of the RDA in a particular region, the YH region. Through the particular case under examination, the chapter emphasise the need for regional analysis to sensitize itself to 'processes' of political and economic change. It is useful to comprehend particular scales as political constructions and that furthermore, any erstwhile geographies of scale are only constitutive and reflective of the political practices of strategic agents, and their own respective scale dependencies (Cox, 1998).

Given its institutional constraints the RDA depended on the collaboration and the resources of sub-regional bodies for the delivery of its agenda. The analysis

concentrates on the politics of 'sub-regional investment planning', Yorkshire Forward's system for delivering of the regional strategy in the YH region. This was devised in 2003, in connection with the provision of the RDA's Single Pot budgets and was based around four sub-regional partnerships (SRPs), tasked with drawing up investment plans for each sub-region. The SRPs were integral to the activity of the RDA and seen as crucial for linking regional strategy to local delivery and for building its profile in the region. The Agency provided the SRPs with 70 per cent of its budget and the SRPs advised it on sub-regional priorities and opportunities. There was uncertainty, however, about the status of the SRPs and the existing partnerships based on individual local authorities or associations of local authorities that, for some, represented the main 'partnership vehicle' for regeneration. These interdependences provide the context for the analysis of the relationship between Yorkshire Forward and its sub-regional partners.

The SRPs can be largely defined as "spaces in themselves" in terms of the functional logic related to the delivery of the regional strategy; there is also a sense in which some might be regarded as "spaces for themselves" in terms of how they correspond with broader geographies of institutionalisation and identification, providing a basis for political action and mobilisation (Lipietz 1994). These considerations raise important questions in relation to the potential for sub-regional arrangements to perform as counter-weights to the agency in their areas. For this reason, beside a more general perspective on the functioning of investment planning this chapter will consider the dynamics between the RDA and its sub-regional partners in the two case areas of the Humber and SY. Both were provided with established arrangements based on sub-regional partnership that constituted the basis for investment planning's SRPs. However significant differences in the existing structures and processes in the two cases indicate that struggles over the production of the region might unfold in different ways in SY and in the Humber.

The research account in this chapter draws on semi-structured interviews with regional and sub-regional governance actors involved in the structures and processes of investment planning and conducted in 2006-2007. Interviewees

included: Yorkshire Forward directors and managers (in both its regional and sub-regional offices); local authority leaders and senior executives; the chief executives of the four SRPs (these were in most cases senior economic development officers seconded from the local authority members) and other agencies, including the Learning and Skills Council (LSC); and economic development consultants. A full list of interviewees is included in Annex 2. Documentary sources were employed to complement, provide further detail on, and update the evidence collected through the interviews. Documentary sources analysed included among others: the review report on Investment Planning produced by the YH Regional Assembly's Scrutiny Board published in 2009; the report of the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Committee inquiry in 'the Work of Yorkshire Forward' published in 2010; the National Audit Office (NAO) Independent Performance Assessment of Yorkshire Forward published in 2007; and the Yorkshire Forward Self-Assessment submitted to the NAO in 2006.

### **1. Sub-regional working prior to the establishment of the RDA, the cases of SY and the Humber**

This section considers sub-regional processes and structures that preceded the entrance of the RDA on the institutional scene focusing on the case areas of SY and the Humber. It examines the events influenced by the designation of SY as an Objective 1 area in the early 2000s and its constitution as a 'space in itself' as well as 'space for itself' in the context of the restructuring of the state as well as the political activity of a SY social bloc. This experience is contrasted with the case of the Humber, a more dysfunctional territory from the point of view of intra-agency collaboration.

## 1.2 Sub-regional governance in SY

The abolition of the South Yorkshire County Council in 1986 led to fragmentary arrangements, where local government became the separate responsibility of four unitary authorities (Sheffield City Council and the three borough councils of Barnsley MBC, Doncaster MBC and Rotherham MBC). Although these authorities individually oversaw the delivery of most public services, such as education, housing and social care, they also collaborated in a statutory partnership, the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority (the SYPTA and its executive arm SYPTE) to manage the provision of local public transport services in the sub-region. This collaboration however was an exception to otherwise fierce interurban competition and political rivalry between the four municipalities (Herschel and Newman, 2002), which was set against a backdrop of national (and EU) public policies dominated by economic development discourses and competitive actions throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The establishment of the SY Forum in the mid 1990s was in part a response to the sub-regional basis of much of the operations of the Government Office for YH after 1994 with the four local authorities of SY forming one of these sub-regions). Initially the SYF's main concern was to secure inward investment into the area. Soon however it became the vehicle to articulate a new space of engagement with the EU and secure the Objective 1 funding package.

The existence of a common objective appeared to be important in setting aside erstwhile differences. Indeed there was a feeling that the area had missed out for the 1994-1999 programming period on Objective 1 enhanced funding package, partly because it had not been able to articulate a single voice. The process of successfully securing Objective 1 status for the 2000-2006 from the EU period acted as a watershed terms of the ease with which the SYF was able to operate effectively as a 'regional armature' acting on behalf, and operating in the name of, the regional area.

Although programme implementation involved a specific partnership encompassing the GO for YH and private and voluntary sectors, the four local authorities played a strong role too. Furthermore, most initiatives funded by Objective 1 have been rolled out on a SY basis, with various partnerships overseeing and coordinating activities which are given a local flavour by smaller participant organisations on the ground. The particularly favourable positioning of some Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in the above networks is well documented in the literature on Objective 1 (Armstrong and Wells, 2006). Since the mid-1990s 'community economic development' (CED) had been a key component of regeneration programmes in the region such as the Single Regeneration Budget and Structural Funds. In particular, the Objective 1 programme's emphasis on CED reflected, and built, the significance of some VCS organisations in the four local authorities areas.

The SY Objective 1 programme was articulated around a set of strategic economic zones; these include the four main urban centres (Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham) and other major employment location. This was in line with the SYF's South Yorkshire Spatial Vision (Ideas-Smiths-Consulting Partnership, 2004) and its emphasis on a broad distribution of economic activity across neighbouring places and jurisdiction. Here local actors circumvented the prevailing ideas of spatial competitive advantage in favour of the principle of 'polycentric development' level. It is important to stress that, this approach was agreed after discussions and negotiations where "spatial policy ideas...shaped and gave a different form of legitimacy to the consensus building" (Richardson and Dabinett, 2005 p. 214).

The constitution of SY as a key site of governance can be traced to changes in the structural form and strategic capacity of the state at both central and local scales. Drawing on Lipietz's (1994) work it is possible also to situate the structuration of SY economic space within the context of the political activity of a particular social coalition or 'regional armature' acting on behalf of, and operating in the name of an area enduring protracted socioeconomic decline.

The constitution of SY as a 'space in itself' as well as a 'space for itself', providing a basis for political action and mobilisation, raises important issues in relation to

the potential for sub-regional arrangements to perform as counter-weights to the new RDA in the area.

### 1.3 Sub-regional governance in the Humber

As indicated in Chapter 4, the Humberside County Council, created with the 1976 local government reform, always had an uneasy existence. Its origins were in part related to a fashionable development idea of the 1960s, the estuarine growth zones (DEA, 1969); with no history as a 'shire', it was perceived as being imposed from the top with much of the population remaining fiercely loyal to Yorkshire or Lincolnshire. The abolition of Humberside in 1996 (replaced by a single-tier system of four unitary authorities: the East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston-upon-Hull, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire) has led to the rather clumsy usage of the Humber Sub-region to describe the same area.

While issues of historical identity were at the root of the popular wave of opposition that led to the abolition of Humberside County Council in 1996; some key decision makers however sought to maintain a push towards sub-regional working so as to be able to continue to scale down National and EU regeneration funds. The formation of the HF partnership in the mid-1990s can be seen as an attempt by key officers within local authorities and related bodies, such as the Humberside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), to defend their spaces of dependence.

The HF was consolidated in 1999 when in connection with the designation of the Humber Trade Zone (HTZ) was constituted as a formal public-private partnership. Overall, the influence in terms of greater collaboration and territorial cohesion of the HF was limited, as local state strategy remained focused almost exclusively on job-creation through inward investment (North East Lincolnshire Council, 1999). The HTZ represented the latest incarnation of the significance of the Humber Ports for regional and national competitiveness strategies. The process was led by a small elite of local officers, with an interest in the development of their own area

(Gibbs et al; 2001, 2007). With regard to other sectors, the emphasis was on representatives of employees at the expenses of other sectors such as VCS. The representation of local businesses took place mostly through the Chambers of Commerce while the engagement of some large companies, such as the Association of British Ports (ABP), was limited to supporting or deterring projects where their interest was at stake. Also, as stressed by Gibbs et al. (2001), the latter acted more as a quasi-public sector organisation than as a private sector business interest.

The Humber sub-regional arrangements lacked the sense of institutional coherence and identity that characterised SY as a 'space for itself'. The sub-region reflected mostly initiatives of national elites designed around the Humber Ports. Certainly at the time of the entrance of the RDA on the institutional scene, there seemed a long way to go before the historical lines of rivalries between the component areas were overcome.

## **2. Yorkshire Forward and Sub-regional Investment Planning**

This section sets out the context of sub-regional investment planning and then proceeds then to examine its functioning focusing on how the RDA interacts with its sub-regional partners in a system of complex inter-dependencies.

### **2.1 Investment Planning and the SRPs**

Chapter 4 (section 3.5) already examined the circumstances of the establishment of Yorkshire Forward and its working arrangements in the region. It is worth reiterating here that at the time of its establishment the agency controlled less than one per cent of total public spending in the region, equivalent to about 0.4 per cent of regional GDP (HM Treasury and DTI, 2001, p.6). Reflecting the complex institutional environment in which Yorkshire Forward operated the first version of the RES identified the agency's roles as varying from that of lead in 16 core



initiatives to an influencing role in 12 and a supporting one in 7 (Yorkshire Forward, 1999). The RES contained only a concise reference to what type of delivery arrangements would be in place, pointing to four action plans for the four sub-regions of WY, SY, NY and the Humber. On the basis of this, Yorkshire Forward created a two-tier corporate governance structure with a regional head office in Leeds and sub-regional offices in Wath-upon-Deane (near Rotherham), Hull, York and Bradford. More details on sub-regional delivery mechanisms were defined only in the aftermath of the RES approval; the particular trajectory of the interplay between strategy formation and the development of an institutional structure for its delivery reflected the extent to which the RDA was dominated by 'central orchestration'. As seen in chapter 6, prior to 2002 the agencies' activities were dominated by 'legacy programmes', thereafter they were granted increased financial flexibility through the Single Pot, which pooled sponsor departments' budgets. In connection with these developments, the RDA devised a system for delivering the RES based on four SRPs as a mean for coordinating Yorkshire Forward's Single Pot with a variety of other economic development funds to maximise the impact of the RES (Yorkshire Forward, 2006).

As a result of its institutional constraints associated with state intervention, Yorkshire Forward depended on the resources of sub-regional partners to execute its strategy; the relationship with sub-regional partners was perceived as "vital" (Yorkshire Forward, Director). The SRPs were seen as key for linking regional strategy to local delivery and as a way to receive advice on sub-regional priorities and opportunities. A significant portion of Yorkshire Forward's budget (70 per cent) was allocated to deliver the four SRPs' Investment Plans. With WY and SY awarded the largest share, allocations reflected principally the economic and thus political significance of the main regional urban authorities. The focus on partnership also brought the attention on the need for more complex decision-making and to move beyond a perception of the RDA 'distributor of funding'.

If developments related to the Single Pot were seen as providing, in the words of one of the Agency's Directors, "greater flexibility to pursue regional goals", regional

executives were also concerned with the perceived pressures to deliver regional targets. This emerges, for example in the following assessment:

we lost the eleven funding streams when we got the Single Pot but then we got eleven tasking framework targets in the first tasking framework so you can read across actually how much change was there.

(Yorkshire Forward, Director)

There was uncertainty over the status of Yorkshire Forward's SRP and regeneration partnerships based on local authorities or associations of local authorities seen by some sectors of Whitehall as main partnership vehicles. Furthermore, as seen in the previous section, the push towards operating through partnership arrangements was not uniform across local authorities in the sub-regions.

The next section examines how these complexities and tensions unfolded in the context of the functioning of investment planning.

## 2.2 Implementing Investment Planning

From interviews conducted with the staff and members of the four SRPs there emerged a picture of investment planning as an arena for discussing project details and negotiating the allocation of the Single Pot between the sub-regional partners rather than as a site for strategic coordination. In particular in the first phases of its implementation, local actors perceived the RDA's Single Pot resources as a unique source of 'uncommitted' funding:

Each of the partners that sits at the table, most of them will have funds which are used to deliver economic outputs ... the main thing about the funding [Yorkshire Forward] brings is that it's the only funding that comes in that is discretionary. All the rest is about delivering existing activity.

(SRP Unit Manager, WY)

Sub-regional agents sought Single Pot funding for the delivery of perceived distinct local priorities sometimes leading to competition and long discussions between the partners; in general, the concern with short term delivery led to a stream of small-scale initiatives as local agencies sought funding to deliver their own mainstream programmes.

The interviews with sub-regional stakeholders highlighted that the gap between RES and delivery derived from the 'top'; regional/sub-regional arrangements involved devolved responsibility for aligning funding streams and programmes originating in departments within Whitehall that were "not talking to each other" (Local Authority, Manager), with insufficient powers and levers to achieve such aims. For example:

all the Government Departments that contribute to the Single Pot require a proportion of targets to match their PSAs with the Treasury and so you have a hugely complex system which means when you try and innovate on the ground you do it in the context of this complexity and it makes it virtually impossible to innovate ... and actually have a meaningful dialogue with an organisation that has got this raft of targets it has to fit in.

(SRP Unit Executive, NY)

Many also emphasised Yorkshire Forward's failure to address emergent problems, as it tended to focus on issues within sub-regional governance at the expenses of the consideration of more structural questions. For example, the review of investment planning presented by the YH Regional Assembly scrutiny board stated:

Yorkshire Forward should have concentrated more effort on resolving the governance issues surrounding other economic development and regeneration funding resources, to ensure that all available and relevant funds were pooled and maximized.

(YH Regional Assembly, 2009 p. 15).

This effectively can also be seen as highlighting a more complex understanding of regional agencies in line with the emphasis here on the interplay between structure and political agency or, following Cox (1998), the spaces of dependence/engagement nexus. While acknowledging the role of the state and associated institutional constraints, for many in the sub-regions, Yorkshire Forward also opted to focus on building itself up as an organisation; in the words of one interviewee, “what they have got as important things are League tables, who’s the best RDA, that’s what they get excited about” (SRP Unit Executive, WY). Thus the Agency was perceived as having limited interest in developing meaningful collaboration with sub-regional partners and articulating spaces of engagement National Government to lobby for regional solutions.

The point is ... about the targets set by the Treasury because that is where they get their targets from; well, hold on, if the targets are wrong then we have to deal with the wrong targets instead of saying “oh my God we can’t meet this” or the only way we can meet these targets is by ... putting the money into the quick wins. It must come a point when you say “this is wrong” and then “how do we do this?” We get on a train and go down to London

(SRP Unit Executive, WY)

In contrast with this, the RDA emphasised how problems in the delivery of the RES derived from local leaders’ focus on gaining Single Pot resources for delivering their own priorities rather than on planning for investment. Many within the Agency highlighted also the interactions between some local political leaders and “powerful friends within Whitehall” (Yorkshire Forward, Director) and the impact of this in terms of distortion of the ‘economic rationale’ of the RDA’s policies:

there are political issues, investment plans are driven by the leaders of the local authorities who often are only there for four years and sometimes less ... we need to be looking at the long term opportunities and needs, we shouldn’t be swayed by the short-term political expediency.

(Yorkshire Forward, Director)

In particular, in the early phases of implementation of investment planning, in a context still characterised by a level of uncertainty, local actors could exploit the opportunities related to the 'local dependence' of the RDA. At this particular stage, the state-led regional agency sought to emphasise opportunity and independence in order to build itself up in the region. Faced with a stream of sub-regional projects Yorkshire Forward "took their foot off the pedal" (Yorkshire Forward, Director) and most of applications submitted were funded through the Single Pot. Given the reality of the constraints to the regional agenda and budget, inevitably, with time, the regional structure found itself increasingly under strain.

The run up to the 2006 RES marked something of a turning point in relation to Yorkshire Forward's region building effort. This, for example, contained specific indications of which agencies should lead on the delivery of each of the priorities identified in the RES with the aim of "naming and shaming" (Yorkshire Forward, Director) or pressurising partners to contribute to the sub-regional investment plan, to align their expenditure. In the meantime, an increasing part of the Regional Fund's portion of the Single Pot, the 30 per cent allocated for sponsoring region wide priorities, came to be delivered directly by the Agency's central office in Leeds.

Within Yorkshire Forward there was a growing concern related to the idea that because sub-regional partners were not doing their bit, some of the targets set by the centre might have been missed, compromising future resources and even the existence of the Agency. The RDA thus mobilised in order to ensure the conditions for growth in its regional space of dependence by delivering directly some projects considered critical for this; one of the Agency's sub-regional directors, observed: "we are at the back and forth of those partners, if they do not deliver we do not deliver and then we have to do something else to make that delivery happen" (Yorkshire Forward, Director).

As the investment plans, reflecting the role of local authorities in the process, focused mostly on physical development in the context of the Renaissance

agenda and projects concerned with infrastructure development, tensions concentrated around the delivery of the Business Competitiveness component of the RES. These were concerned with the 'software' side of economic development and thus, for example, knowledge-based projects, innovation and small business growth. One of Yorkshire Forward's Directors conceded the existence of a "genuine debate" and that there was not a single answer to the question: "at what spatial level do you make the intervention?" (Yorkshire Forward, Director). This question strikes at the very core of the debate on scale and political agency and how the two play out in, and in the process (re-) produce, certain regional spaces of governance. The Agency perceived also increasing pressure related to the idea that for Central Government "renaissance activities needed to encompass labour market and competitiveness initiatives and not only physical development" (NAO, 2007):

We have a strong Renaissance agenda, that's an example where we have been able to work and get some agreement. The Renaissance Agenda is about the physical fabric of our towns and cities which is notoriously difficult to measure in 'hard' economic terms, the Tasking Framework is very much output based not outcome based so it means that every investment you make needs pretty much a three year return on it and that's an issue.

(Yorkshire Forward, Director)

However for many in the sub-regions the RDA was interested in increasing its influence over the sub-regions or "ring fenced funding so that they, as funders can deliver this and so build themselves up" (SRP Unit Manager, WY).

The developing interaction between a mobile context and the strategies of regional actors can be better outlined by following Cox's scheme (1998). In particular, it is important to stress that, by 2005 Yorkshire Forward had been able to carve a significant power niche within the UK state apparatus through the English RDAs networks and its role in leading, on behalf of the latter, relations with the Treasury. Also, an increasing number of national programmes were channelled through the RDA in the region.

A discourse that sought to de-legitimise the existing understanding of renaissance

priorities in favour of one that emphasised the link with competitiveness and the need to focus more on foreign direct investment, privileged, and was supported by, the RDA:

we have some issues about how the region is positioned in the UK, European and global economy... we should be doing more with the Universities around innovation, more with the businesses in this region to position them to compete in a global market. ...we have to say what are our selling points are and that isn't about low value activities... we have improved the economy, the skills levels are going up, we are not there yet and I think if we are not careful and don't keep these things going... we don't want to go back to how things were.

(Yorkshire Forward, Manager)

Some interviewees emphasised the gap between such strategies and the legacy of an institutional infrastructure in the YH region that was better disposed to different phases of economic development, compounded by the peripherality of the region with respect to accumulation processes:

I would suggest an economic development model that is not matched with an infrastructure model to support that economic development it's a recipe for problems.  
there's no doubt that through the RDAs, government has put more money into economic development... what you have actually seen is that we are a wealthier region but the gap between the most wealthy and those who are still workless or on incapacity benefit, which is a big issue in the region in terms of former industry workers, is much bigger than it was...

(Regional Assembly, Policy Manager)

This comment illustrates very effectively the strategic dilemmas faced by public agencies when tackling economic governance in reconversion spaces amid the current era of institutional complexity, economic uncertainty and social-environmental risks.

In relation to the impact of the RDA on the delicate balance between regional and localist coalitions, employing directly the 'Regional Fund', the RDA was capable of

bypassing the sub-regions to deliver directly some projects considered critical for delivering its key centrally set priorities; in this way the RDA attempted to fill the 'gaps' in the investment plan in relation to the national targets. These circumstances point to significant differences with respect to Harrison's account of 'regionally orchestrated centralism' (Harrison, 2008) where the RDAs are seen as capable of exercising control over the sub-regions. The case of the YH region indicates instead to the difficulty of providing such clear-cut reading. This, in turn, invites a more detailed analysis that, moving beyond uniform references to 'sub-regions', considers the presence of a range of sub-regional arrangements and variegated interests and alliances.

### **3. Sub-regional Investment Planning, the cases of SY and the Humber**

The first part of the chapter (section 1.1. and 1.2) examined the different structures and processes underpinning the production of the two sub-regional spaces of SY and the Humber. In the prevalently urban area of the former SY metropolitan authority, efforts to develop greater sub-regional collaboration to moderate some of the more negative effects of increased competitions between localities were boosted by the opportunities provided by the designation as Objective 1 area. Following the abolition of the Humber County Council, the regeneration programmes promoted by central government and targeted at the Humber Ports led to the formation of more dysfunctional arrangements in terms of the collaboration between different local components. This section explores the sub-regional politics of investment planning in these different case study areas of SY and the Humber.

#### **3.1. Sub Regional Investment Planning in the Humber**

As seen in the first part of the chapter (section 1.2), the sense of what was identified as the Humber sub-region related mostly to the regeneration initiatives



promoted by national elites based around the Humber Ports. In the late 1990s, the interest in accessing national and regional funds resulted in sub-regional arrangements that were characterised by significant dysfunctions from the viewpoint of the collaboration between the different local components.

Nonetheless, in 2003 the HF was further restructured as the collaborative strategic body for the sub-region. It was constituted as a formal partnership with status as a private company limited by guarantee and run by a Board chaired by a representative of the private sector. Four seats were for elected leaders or Chief Executives from the local authorities, four others were for private sector representatives. Two further seats were for the Chair of the sub-regional LSC and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Hull. The Board was accountable through the Humber Council, a grouping of over one hundred senior representatives from stakeholder organisations. Additions such as the greater emphasis on elected representatives and the Council indicated an effort towards expanding the breath of the partnership. However, many respondents in the sub-region felt that the process was still dominated by the 'usual suspects'. The Council for example, appointed only two, out of twelve members, with little opportunity to effectively influence the representational form of the Board. The representation of the private sector was limited to directors of large businesses at the expenses of smaller business, social enterprises and representative of employees. The lack of representation from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) also was not generally seen as a problem as emphasis was instead on the successful engagement of some private sector actors in the process. For example:

Yorkshire Forward ...have pointed to some success in engaging businesses in the Humber sub-region...the respondents have confirmed that it has been easier to engage businesses in the Humber.

(YH Regional Assembly, 2009 p. 16)

If the RDA emphasised the impact of its decision to support to sub-regional business network through investment planning, others stressed instead the strategies of some private sector organisations with "a common interest in the

development of the Humber ports, and the economic benefits that this has for their business” (YH Regional Assembly, 2009 p.16). In positioning themselves within the new governance arrangements, these agents could mobilise the resources developed originally in the context of the County Council’s regeneration policies focused on public-private partnership:

the HF is a private company; a public-private partnership... so in that regard it is different from the model of the other three sub regions. The other sub regional partnerships are basically people working within local authorities, the HF is different, it goes back to the abolition of Humberside County Council.

(Stakeholder, Humber)

The vociferousness of claims about being an “organisation of the sub-region and for the sub-region” (SRP Unit Manager, Humber) and concerns about the agenda the new state agency might pursue, articulated in terms of the “need to ensure that the priorities on which we are working are truly sub-regional priorities ... not ... imposed from the region” (HF Chief Executive, quoted in North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire, 2006, evidence II), indicated the extent to which the institutional politics of the previous years had become entrenched among some sub-regional policy agents.

If tensions between existing sub-regional programmes and the RDA are suggested by the stance above, this should not be seen as suggesting the existence of a sub-regional ‘coalition’ that was any more stable and coherent than a ‘regionalist’ ones. In the Humber the process of investment planning was dominated by competition between different local partners (in particular between the North and South Bank) leading to, in the words of a sub-regional stakeholder, “shopping lists, wish lists and ambitions with no real substance behind” (Stakeholder, Humber). Aware of the absence of a shared vision and under pressure to produce the plan, the HF turned the focus on project details leading to fragmentation in an array of small-scale initiatives.

The latter reflected mostly the role of local authorities; the 'Renaissance' delivery theme dominated the plan with the Business delivery theme, focused more on business services and the proposals of businesses considerably less significant (some 9 per cent of the expected value of the plan). In general, the project focused approach translated also in emphasis on the 'hardware' of economic development (for example, site development and transport infrastructure) rather than the 'software' side (for example, innovation and knowledge-intensive activities, training etc.).

The Board approved the investment plan in 2004. However it was not only Yorkshire Forward that was dissatisfied with the prioritisation produced; it also brought into relief the historical rivalries between different components, in particular between the North and South Bank. The Humber's process of investment planning was described by one interviewee as "adversarial on three ways" (Stakeholder, Humber). Here regional-sub-regional tensions seemed to co-exist with those internal to the sub-region in helping to shape the emergent arrangements.

The subsequent process of delivery was characterised by an increasing backlog of projects and concerns that the sub-region was under-spending its allocation.

Sub-regional respondents believed that the regional framework was biased in favour of the needs of SY and WY and the perceived priorities of the Humber were marginalised. The Humber effectively accounted for a smaller proportion of the Single Pot compared to the other two and also had a very low proportion of projects. There was a widely held view that the sub-region was disadvantaged when bidding for funding at regional level. The explanation provided for this was that the area was peripheral with respect to the rest of the regional economy and thus also politically peripheral; perhaps for its urban-rural mix capacity to develop project proposals was limited:

... the Humber sub-region is already disadvantaged when bidding for funding at the regional level...[b]ig cities with high population density and a wide variety of industry and infrastructure enables the West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire sub – regions(with larger economies of scale) to be recipients of comparably high levels of

funding over recent years. Significantly, West Yorkshire's partnership's core funding is provided by Yorkshire Forward.

(HF Chief Executive, quoted in North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire, 2006, evidence II)

It was also recognised that in part the lack of a shared strategy was a reason for 'underperformance'; the same actor above, for example, stressed the need for local authorities to see partnership more as a "two way process rather than a one way expectation".

This comment can be better understood in relation to, for example, the initiative of key officers of the South Bank authorities that questioned the financial support for the HF on the basis of a perceived lack of 'value for money' for their organisations. This orientation reflected also to the influence of wider processes as, at the time, these local actors were dealing with the consequences of a financial crisis that in part was the result of state action and significant deficits of institutional capacity. Perceived as failing organisations at National level (NAO, 2004), they were undergoing significant organisational changes and were under significant pressure to deliver 'value for money'.

Local authorities, like Hull, East Lincolnshire, are poorly performing in a corporate governance sense because they are driven very much by targets of front line service delivery to citizens, a lot of the back room strategic capabilities, analytical capabilities has been regarded as superfluous...now two new Chief executives have been brought in to rescue failing local authorities so their priorities are to rescue those authorities.

(Stakeholder, Humber)

It was the discourse of 'partnership crisis' promoted by the RDA that provided the dominant interpretation of the problems of the Humber. This led to significant institutional change in the sub-region, as part of the Agency's region building effort, which involved the entrance of a new actor, the private consultant KPMG to replace the role of the Humber Forum. This process was accompanied by an

interpretation that emphasised underperformance as the result of weaknesses endogenous to the partnership with little or no mention of wider economic, political and social processes. This emerges in the following reflection of the KPMG consultants on the brief from the RDA:

...[the RDA's officials are] knocking their heads against the wall in the Humber...the local authorities are all attacking each other all the time... you won't see any real difference until they get that mind set in terms of realising that is not about little tiny things and focus on the bigger picture.

(Stakeholder, Humber)

Alongside this was a view for which excessively bureaucratic structures and processes had hindered investment planning and which paid little attention to fragmentation and limited resources and powers:

They didn't think [investment planning] was done properly...the management process took too long...the HF was not efficient enough... too many projects were coming through that maybe shouldn't have and that were too small scale...

(Stakeholder, Humber)

The RDA suggested that the HF was a 'block' and preventing the area from maximising the amount of regional funds available. Concerns related to their scalar dependence in relation to the RDA led local actors to withdraw their support of the HF; the latter found itself isolated:

Yorkshire Forward was suggesting to local authorities and local authorities were beginning to perceive, that they were not getting enough money as they should have been doing from Yorkshire Forward because HF was confrontational and argumentative...Officers in several local authority districts... because they are weak, they ended up ... blaming the next layer up in the organisation.

(Stakeholder, Humber)

As said above, the RDA's discourse of partnership crisis activated institutional change in the sub-region (as part wider process of region building). It is important to stress that other views existed but remained minority views. For example, some believed that tensions arise within complex governance systems that do not necessarily translate in a crisis that requires change, but this was not presented as a cause of partnership failure by the RDA. This emerges for example in the view of one senior member of the HF executive:

our role is to be that broker and mediator...the best way to get an agreement on a new initiative on which they have a different viewpoints is to channel it through us...each of them will have an equal say through a direct representative but they have the benefit then of having a debate at Board level with member say from the private sector, University, LSC... There are tensions, on some subjects it is mild, on some tense; in terms of Single Pot funding ... yes, in general, the South Bank takes the view that the majority of funds go to the North Bank and in general Hull takes that view with East Riding, overall it's pretty even...each partner has the same opportunity...

(SRP Unit Manager, Humber)

This quote seems to highlight a greater concern with the 'process' of governance, wider deliberation through formalised mechanisms was perceived as important for mediating conflicts in terms of public resource allocation. Sub-regional agents recognised also that such arrangements and those of the regional structure "don't fit together easily", with the agency perceived as favouring arrangements more focused towards delivery of its regional growth targets (HF Chief Executive, quoted in North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire, 2006, evidence II).

At the beginning of 2006, following the resignation of its Chief Executive and change of denomination, the consultant KPMG replaced the Forum as the main strategic partner in the management of investment planning. At the time of the research, the outcomes of this process were still to emerge fully. However a number of elements appear to indicate that the reconfiguration reflected Yorkshire Forward's idea of how a partnership should look like, moving sub-regional investment planning further towards a managerialist framework concerned with delivering central targets. There was an emphasis on, in the words of the KPMG

consultant, “the need to focus more on larger programmes” and “if you are giving X money here, X money there you are never going to see any development” (Stakeholder, Humber). This suggests also that the policies pursued by the RDA might not only have little impact in terms of greater cohesion at sub-regional level but also lead to a further bolstering of earlier geographical fractures.

While in the other sub-regions Yorkshire Forward sponsored the involvement of private consultants in the production of the Sub-Regional Economic Assessment, the brief to KPMG underlined the different extent and nature of such involvement in the Humber. This emerges in the following statement from one of the consultants:

In the other sub-regions in Yorkshire there is another company ...they are very different from us, they are very much statistical based...their Sub-regional Economic Assessment it's very different from ours, ours has opinions in it, that's what we are paid for. In the Humber they need answers, they needed to understand where they were, where they need to focus on over the next three years.

(Stakeholder, Humber)

KPMG not only produced a new Sub-Regional Economic Assessment but was also involved in project development and guided local partners in the identification of other funding sources or in making sure they responded to the criteria set by the RDA:

[an] area of its role is project development work, working with sponsors to put together strong projects which have a higher chance of gaining approval and therefore funding. So if anyone partner has a capacity gap, KPMG can help them with that.

(SRP Unit Manager, Humber)

The new arrangements, through the role of KPMG, reflected the perceived need to emphasise more the link between regeneration and competitiveness and focus on innovation and knowledge-based projects. The strategies that did not fit with this criterion, and related locally based bodies, were put into question.

Yorkshire Forward said “we are not going to give any more money for tourism, we have already done that”... people want to change through image building...the money that has been thrown at it... it probably won't create that much regeneration. That money could have been spent in terms of pumping in new innovation ...it would have made hell of a lot bigger difference... so much money get pumped into it ... City Image, [their] salaries were massive compared to an RDA and with what level of achievement?

(Stakeholder, Humber)

There is evidence that concerns for the RDA intervention extended beyond the Humber to the rest of the region although these related mostly to a perception of increased uncertainty; for example

The HF was, quite justifiably in my view, very critical of Yorkshire Forward...and Yorkshire Forward instead of trying and working it through with partners gave it to KPMG...but you need political engagement, it's not a technical exercise, you need to engage with stakeholders and the people who have got resources such as local authorities...it was a mistake, an overreaction and a failure to show how you can negotiate through sensible partnership working.

(SRP Unit Executive, NY)

Perhaps also as a response to these pressure, the RDA later decided that the operational management of the process would be taken on by anew sub-regional Group composed by the senior representatives of public and private sector organisations and KPMG would act as a Secretariat for this group. There was yet little clarity in relation to the membership of the new Group except for the perception that it reflected the RDA's desire to inject “new blood” in the sub-regional arrangements.

Perhaps even more significantly, the new Group was narrowly conceived as a mechanism to deliberate on the ‘strategic fit’ between the project proposals and the priorities identified in the SEA. This involved that negotiations around project



details be removed from the sub-regional partnership domain and negotiated by project sponsor with the delivery agencies (whether Yorkshire Forward or not), with KPMG playing a central role:

Consultations and discussion with partners... is not that we have eradicated them but they no longer have responsibility for endorsement, they are used as a consultancy group. Once [a proposal] has been endorsed, we then contact the project sponsors and let them know the decision of the Board. If it hasn't what we will do is we will sit down with the sponsors, take them through the reasons why and see if they can bring out the criteria the Board need.

(Stakeholder, Humber)

A discourse that emphasised endogenous weaknesses and weak governance as reasons for the underperformance drove an institutional reconfiguration with a potential to impact significantly on existing power relations. While this involved more streamlined arrangements it also had a potential to provide the RDA and its allies within central government even greater influence over the economic 'priorities' for the sub-region.

The account above has outlined a process of 'regionally orchestrated centralism' (Harrison, 2009) but one that was sub-regionally specific, with the struggles shaping the YH region taking a sub-regional specific form.

There was the sense that in the Humber, the RDA could, in the words of a sub-regional stakeholder, "get away with it" (SRP Unit, Executive).

### 3.2 Investment Planning in SY

Earlier in the chapter (section 1.2) examined the political process involved in the constitution of SY as a 'space in itself' as well as a 'space for itself' outlining how these were strongly influenced by its designation as Objective 1 area for the 2000-2006 period. It is worth here remembering here that the SY Forum was originally set up by the four local authorities in 1997 as a voluntary partnership vehicle to

oversee the construction of a shared economic strategy for SY, seen as pre-condition for the allocation of EU Structural Funds in accordance with its formal regulation requiring Partnership. Later it oversaw, and sought to influence, the development of the programme and finally signed-off the process before the Objective 1 Programme Directorate was charged with its management. Programme implementation involved a specific partnership encompassing regional agencies and private and voluntary sectors however the four local authorities played a strong role too. Furthermore, investment was delivered via six 'priority' partnerships, reflecting the structure of the Programme and each being a partnership of stakeholder interests related to each priority.

In 2003, the introduction of sub-regional investment planning provided the catalyst for the restructuring of the South Yorkshire Forum, also re-branded as SYP, as the collaborative strategic body for the sub-region.

The SYP was closely aligned to the Objective 1 Programme this was for the simple aim to ensure that Objective 1 funding could be matched and therefore drawn down from the European Commission. The four councils had a strong input to the sub-regional planning process and the VCS played a significant role too in the proceedings. As indicated earlier in the chapter (section 1.2), since the mid-1990s CED had been a key component of regeneration programmes in the region such as the Single Regeneration Budget and Structural Funds. Armstrong and Wells (2006), showed in particular how the significant CED component of the Objective 1 Programme reflected, and further built, the power of some VCS organisations. These actors could negotiate a favourable position with respect to formal and informal sub-regional networks in the sub-region with a particular view towards ensuring future funding. This explained the significant presence of VCS representatives on the SYP Board as well as at officers' level in the emergent investment planning arrangements in the sub-region.

The SYP coalition moulded investment planning in the form of "five sub-programmes, one for each LSP and then a SY fund" (SRP Unit, Manager). The input from four substantial local authorities in the investment planning process ensured that there continued to be a spread of new development across the sub-

region rather than a focus simply on Sheffield. This sub-regional plan was also aligned with the South Yorkshire Spatial Vision (Idea-Smiths-Consulting Partnership, 2004), which explicitly recognised the sub-region as a 'dispersed conurbation' and the Objective 1 Programme's articulation around a set of 'strategic economic zones'. As stressed earlier in the chapter (section 2.1), this however encapsulated a politics of 'fair share' agreed through discussions and negotiations between the four local authorities.

Yorkshire Forward perceived this as a situation in which the senior members and leaders of the four councils wanted to reinforce existing power relations. For example:

what you have got here is four very strong leaders, four very strong Chief Executives who have been used to ... having their own destiny in their own hands and continue to want to do that... other sub-regions are much more interesting because you have got that open debate and you have that influencing, that jockeying for position, people trying to win other people over... in South Yorkshire you have got four people ... who have had a meeting beforehand who have actually decided on this, have honed out between them... who's top dog on this and will come with a very definite view...

(Yorkshire Forward, Sub-Regional Manager)

In promoting the 'SY model' sub-regional agents emphasised the greater capacity of the sub-region to deliver outcomes "both in time and on budget" (Councillor, Sheffield) with respect to other sub-regions. Problems derived instead from the way in which Yorkshire Forward "tried to micro-manage individual projects which means the timescales are extremely long, bureaucracy is extremely complex".

It is important to notice how SY leaders mobilised the dominant ideas of what a partnership should look like, emphasising 'efficient decision making' and a focus on 'making things happen', rather than 'process', to promote its arrangements. Similarly, Yorkshire Forward's assessment recognised that in SY, "things happen that would not normally happen" (Yorkshire Forward, Sub-regional Manager).

Particular tensions concentrated around the delivery of this CED component. As indicated above, in 2004 the idea that regeneration programmes should support

VCS community based projects was being politically delegitimised as local regeneration funding such as SRB were targeted for reduction. One key argument brought forward concerned the need for the VCS to become more sustainable<sup>21</sup>. From the perspective of the VCS organisations, and apply Cox's scheme, this shift amounted to a threat to the existing institutional fix and its deeply embedded spaces of dependence. It was in this climate that, in 2005, VCS and councils' leaders began discussions with Yorkshire Forward around a perceived 'funding cliff edge' (Shutt and Kumi-Ampofo, 2005). Thus the 'established' status of CED and local regeneration programmes became increasingly a space of contestation with political struggles around it unfolding over the boundaries of sub-national economic governance.

The legacy of the previous arrangements reflected in perception that CED was not Yorkshire Forward's business: "...community economic development, community centres, etc., is not a RDA's business but it's not clear whose business it is" (Yorkshire Forward, Director). It became a matter of primary concern for the RDA in the region to stress a level of discontinuity in the sub-regions with respect to the previous SRB regime; for example, "Yorkshire Forward still does economic inclusion ... we just don't necessarily do it the same way it was done ten years ago" (Yorkshire Forward, Director). However Yorkshire Forward was also aware the need to respond to the demands of VCS leaders as these harnessed formal and informal networks with political allies within local authorities and beyond in order to secure a continuous flow of funding:

... around 50 million pounds of our funding is levered through the VCS, we know this because...they are a powerful lobby and they have some very powerful political friends...

(Yorkshire Forward, Manger)

In SY the Objective 1 Programme contributed to supporting many projects and endowed some VCS organisations with significant political resources. Existing

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<sup>21</sup>See for example Wells et al. (various reports through 2010 and 2011) on the effectiveness of programmes to generate greater VCS sustainability.

formal and informal ties with key local players in the form could be mobilised to ensure a favourable positioning in relation to emergent regional funding opportunities. This contributed to the RDA's particularly strong perception of the need to get the most vocal components of the sector 'off its back' in SY:

The most vocal [stakeholder group] is the VCS... they have got quite a good network in SY that does an admirable job but obviously it means that whenever you turn up at any meeting there's about three or four of them.

(Yorkshire Forward, Sub-Regional Manager)

Interviews with sub-regional agents emphasised Yorkshire Forward's instrumentalist view of CED projects, a perception that projects that produced a quantifiable 'outputs' tended to be favoured over those that reflected what were addressed as 'local needs'.

For example in the account of one SYP's officer:

the VCS would argue that a lot of the things they are involved in, volunteering, helping people to gain confidence and giving generic skills, are things that assist with employability and make big contributions to the economy although at the end of the day they are not reflected in measures like GDP or GVA. So, they would be arguing that they should be getting funding to support that kind of activity, to build capacity to deliver those things...but it's a struggle to get Yorkshire Forward to buy into that role.

(SRP Unit Manager, SY)

Despite initial resistances, Yorkshire Forward directly intervened in funding community development projects through the decision to support the £35 million SY Social Infrastructure Programme (SY Partnership, 2006). While in the Humber, the RDA's intervention led to shaping arrangements in a way that followed the agency's ideas of what partnerships should look like in relation to its concern with delivering the national targets, in SY things seemed to unfold almost in the opposite way.

The moulding of investment planning in SY manifested in the form of five 'mini' investment plans, one for each LSP and one for SY, and in a significant CED component. As suggested above, this 'moulding' involved, in the words of a regional policy manager, "a combination of high and low politics"(Yorkshire Forward, Sub-regional manager) or the working of a double politics of scale.

The SYP, taking the mantle of 'regional armature' and bypassing Yorkshire Forward's sub-regional office or even the Agency itself, could liaise directly with the RDA's Chief Executive or Ministers to moderate some of the policies of the RDA, in line with the existing sub-regional strategy.

[local leaders and chief executives] are either well respected or have powerful friends within Whitehall...it means that if something goes against what they want to do, for example if the RDA says it's not going to do a project then they will be more inclined not to accept that decision, they will be more inclined either to fight against it, go directly to the Chief Executive, the Chair or, if that doesn't work, go directly to their MP to actually say "this is wrong".

(Yorkshire Forward, Sub-regional Manager)

The established central-local relations in the case of significant urban authorities can explain only in part the processes above; the opportunities for engagement were also strongly influenced by the co-existence of Objective 1 regime and associated financial and political resources. First, in their role as key force behind the political constitution of the SY 'regional armature', the SY leaders were certainly more advantage than other local leaders in gaining an audience for their instances. Second, awareness of the need to continue to scale down EU regional aid meant that Ministers favoured the regeneration partnerships based on alliances of local authorities as main partnership vehicle in the area.

While in the Humber the perception prevailed among the sub-regional agents that it would be to their detriment to 'not go along' with Yorkshire Forward, in SY the Agency perceived that it would be to its detriment to 'not go along' with sub-regional partners:

it is a bit of an intimidating culture...the RDA has to be careful of how it sits politically and what it looks like, sometimes we have to give in to that, whether in other areas we wouldn't necessarily have given in because the partners would never have got to that position.

(Yorkshire Forward, Sub-regional Manager)

In SY therefore governance tensions in the delivery of regional development unfolded in a different, if not opposite way with respect to the case of the Humber, effectively leading to the isolation of the RDA.

### 3.3 Investment Planning in West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire

The different (almost opposite) outcomes examined above, highlight the impact of existing sub-regional structures and processes in the process of region building. In the case of the former metropolitan areas of WY, before the entrance of the RDA, the relations between local authorities were dominated by competition between the two largest cities of Leeds and Bradford and general distrust of the core city on the part of neighbouring authorities. The prospect of accessing regional funds resulted in sub-regional arrangements that remained highly dysfunctional from the perspective in particular of the collaboration between different component authorities. Reflecting the power of the two urban authorities of Leeds and Bradford, regional funds were provided to support the operations of the WYP and the area was provided with a Single Pot allocation that was not significantly inferior to the one of SY.

In the case of NY, the NYP encapsulated a coalition of small rural district authorities under the umbrella of the NY County and the city of York and the scale of the economic development resources available was relatively minor.

The regional/sub-regional dynamics of investment planning in WY and NY were more balanced, somewhat in the middle ground with respect to the 'extremes' of SY and the Humber:

in West Yorkshire they have got very powerful bodies, Bradford and Leeds...they would have found themselves in big arguments all the time, in North Yorkshire, you know, it wasn't necessary, we weren't arguing with them that much...

(SRP Unit, Executive, NY)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the interaction between the emergent 'state spatial project' of RDA regionalism and the fragmented political-institutional landscape of the YH region. Integrating established perspectives based on a view on the state and the region, it has brought into focus the struggles that followed the establishment of the RDA. The case examined has offered key insights into the processes involved in the production of regions in particular in relation to the process of 'regionally orchestrated centralism' where the RDA is seen as capable of exercising control over the sub-regions (Harrison, 2008).

The analysis showed that initially as the RDA sought to live up to its responsibility emphasising independence and opportunities it appeared somewhat in thrall to the demands of its sub-regional partners. Later, given the reality of its constraints and the need to ensure conditions for growth in its regional space of dependence, the Agency adopted increasingly interventionist strategies towards the sub-regions. These strategies involved, first of all, the mobilisation of a discourse that emphasised the link between regeneration and competitiveness (and delegitimised the existing interpretation of regeneration); secondly the delivery of an increasing number of projects directly through the Agency's central office.

Here, emphasis was placed on the interaction between a shifting policy context and the strategies of the RDA as they sought to gain increased control over organisations that were perceived as 'rivals'. An increasing number of national programmes were channelled through the RDAs, as Yorkshire Forward had been able to carve a significant power niche within the UK state apparatus through the English RDAs' network and its role in leading, on behalf of the latter, relations with the Treasury.



In the region, the Agency could often bypass the sub-regions to directly deliver some projects considered critical for delivering its centrally set priorities and filled perceived 'gaps' in the sub-regional investment plans.

Two key points can be raised here. First, tensions and contradictions characterising new regional spaces of governance are not simply the result of new (neo-liberal oriented) practices interacting with 'old' ones. The analysis has shown tensions and contradictions derived largely from the way in which the state designed its policies but were compounded by local arrangements characterised by strong vertical dependencies orienting the strategies of local actors. Path-dependencies therefore can be seen as a source of tensions and contradictions; their significance however should be examined in association with the actual (in-) consistencies of emergent strategies and practices.

Second, the perceived 'gaps' above point to some differences with respect to accounts of 'regionally orchestrated centralism' (where the Agency is seen as capable of exercising control over the sub-regions) suggesting instead the difficulty of providing such clear-cut reading. This, in turn, indicated that it might be necessary to consider such process as being sub-regionally specific.

While in the Humber a process of 'regionally orchestrated centralism' took place where the RDA could impose new arrangements more favourable to the realisation of its own agenda, in SY the influence of the RDA was almost neutralised.

The Humber's mix of cities, towns and rural areas lacked the institutional coherence and identity for which SY could be characterised as a 'space for itself'. In this case tensions between regional/sub-regional programmes, clear in the actions of Yorkshire Forward and the Humber Forum, co-existed with strong tensions between the different localities and interests within the sub-region. The analysis has brought into focus the political construction of the new RDA's SRP arrangements that replace the role Humber Forum. A discursive construction of the problems of the area that emphasised endogenous weaknesses, at the expenses of wider political and economic processes, selected and was supported by the RDA as this sought to neutralise other actors perceived as a 'block' to the

realisation of its agenda. While the outcome of this process might present in the form of a more streamlined institutional solution, the latter is also one through which the RDA increases its influence over the developmental trajectory and its scalar dependence. Rather than moderating half-masked conflicts between different interests and localities over the location of economic activity, the approach favoured by the RDA, focused on larger economic projects with an impact on regional growth, in fact show a potential for bolstering such conflicts.

Through the institutions involved in the governance of Objective 1, SY was constituted as 'space in itself' as well as a 'space for itself' (Lipietz, 1994), providing a basis for political action and mobilisation. This drew attention to forces coming together in a distinct SY 'regional armature' or coalition generating the capacity and political legitimacy that enabled them to claim to represent the interests of the area as a whole (Lipietz, 1994; MacLeod, 1999). In relation to this, the analysis emphasised two aspects; first, the role of local authorities that had come together in a sub-regional coalition and shared a concern to moderate some of the effects of increased competition in the former SY metropolitan authority and second, the significance of the sub-regional VCS network. The opportunities for engagement that allowed the SYP to successfully lobby for outcomes more favourable to its interests in the context of the RDA's investment planning seemed to be strongly influenced by the (co-)existence of the Objective 1 regime. In their role as the force behind the political constitution of the SY 'regional armature', the SY leaders were certainly more advantaged than others in gaining a wider audience for their instances. Ministers were too aware of the need to deliver the Objective 1 programme and scale down EU regional aid, favouring the regeneration partnerships based on alliances of local authorities in the sub-region as main partnership vehicle in the area. In SY, the existing sub-regional arrangements 'moulded' investment planning in four 'mini' investment plan, one for each LSP and incorporated a significant CED component ensuring continuity with SRB funding and Structural Funds.

Therefore, rather than a process of 'regionally orchestrated centralism', where the RDA is seen as being able to control the sub-regions, this research emphasises

the difficulty of providing such clear cut reading in the YH region. This is not equivalent to arguing that the RDA was powerless, nor that 'regionally orchestrated centralism' did not occur in other regions. However the question of the political significance of some sub-regional spaces and the ability of local leaders to exploit this as a means of 'jumping scale' and win resources in the face of competition from a less progressive alliance is certainly worth greater attention. The case examined here suggests that opportunities for engaging a wider audience and spaces of engagement might be connected to the (temporary) role of the SY leaders in the context of the EU Objective 1 regime. This seems to suggest that Spaces of engagement are regulated by particular conjunctural windows; these provide local actors the opportunity to temporarily reach a wider audience. In other words, strategy is curtailed by the strength of social forces at a particular time.

The state space approach retains its value over relational approaches not only for its emphasis on scale but also for its sensitivity towards the historical dimension of state restructuring focusing on processes of institutional layering as spaces are subject to modifications in line with state spatial projects (Brenner, 2004; Peck, 2001). By contrast relational approaches tend to view space as essentially empty or unstructured prior to its constitution by actor networks reflecting the emphasis on 'fluidity' derived from actor-network theory and other post-structuralist philosophies.

On its own however the state space approach offers little assistance for seriously exploring political struggles over the scaling of institutions and the contingent circumstances affecting the various ways in which such struggles unfold nationally, regionally and sub-regionally.

The related notions of 'politics of scale' (Cox, 1998) and 'regional armatures' (Lipietz, 1994) help reworking the state space approach adopted here to accommodate contingent forms of agency and politics. The analysis in this chapter could make use of this enriched set of conceptual tool in order to integrate and update well-established perspectives on the state and the region and explore better 'how' functions are attacked, defended, up-scaled, downscaled through the

RDA itself. At the same time it has emphasised the potential openness of state structures to more progressive agendas, compared to more structuralist-oriented approaches. This requires the formation of distinct territorial social coalition or a “regional armature” (Lipietz, 1994) that can develop alternative state (or sub-state) and hegemonic projects (Jessop 1990) in order to gain access to state resources and functions in the face of competition from other groups advancing less progressive agendas. In the context of political science research on regions (Keating 2002), this framework also contributes greater emphasis to the link between local actors and localised social relations to wider processes of state restructuring.

# 8. Re-shaping the region: advancing the city-region in and through the region

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter further develops the themes of competing 'regionalisms' explored through chapter's 7 analysis of the political construction of the YH region. In order to help developing a better understanding of the "on-going struggle for the control of space" (Jonas and Ward, 2004, p. 2135) it explores how the region evolved in connection with the development of the UK particular brand of city-regionalism examined in chapter 6.

The post-2006 period in the YH region was characterised by hectic jockeying for position, underpinned by concerns of different regional and sub-regional actors for their respective scalar dependencies in a context dominated by uncertainty. The focus here is on the impact of the developing politics of city-regionalism on the regional/sub-regional relations examined in Chapter 7.

Initially Yorkshire Forward perceived the rise of the city-region largely in terms of a 'threat' to its scale dependencies the Agency however, through the English RDAs Networks, the Agency was also an important interlocutor of in discussions future of regional policy. Indeed, the new city-regionalism that was advanced by the UK Government seemed to reflect, and further consolidate, the influence of these agents. From the mid-2000s the RDA went through a period of change, emblematised by the appointment of a new Chief Executive and prompted in part by the perceived pressure to respond to the developing city-regional agenda and points of criticism raised, among others, by the NAO (2007). The first part of the chapter examines the reform of sub-regional investment planning in order to understand how Yorkshire Forward's interest in ensuring conditions for growth in

his regional space of dependence informs the approach to advancing the city-regional agenda in the region.

The new city-regionalism can be seen as working to further delegitimise traditional regeneration policies, a tendency that, significantly, was identified in the context of Chapter 7's discussion of regional/sub-regional tensions and the argument for further linking local regeneration to competitiveness.

From a sub-regional perspective (and applying Cox's scheme [1998]), the emergent political strategy amounted to a 'threat' to existing sub-regional institutional arrangements and related spaces of dependence.

The analysis will consider the mobilisation of key leaders at regional and local level around the Sheffield City Region as a response to the requirement of the Northern Way, the successive configuration of the Sheffield City Region Forum as an elitist project and the tensions with the SYP. While the previous SRP's arrangements had genuine organic roots, these new regional/sub-regional configurations risks re-opening some of the earlier geographical fractures.

To explore these issues, this chapter draws on insights from semi-structured interviews with regional, local and sub-regional policy actors involved in advancing the city-regional agenda in the Yorkshire and Humber region and, in particular, directly engaged in the Sheffield City Region initiative (see Annex 1 for a complete list). It also draws on field notes taken during attendance at a meeting of the Sheffield City Region Forum that took place in Chesterfield in July 2007 and documentary evidence that includes: various minutes of meetings of the Sheffield City Region Forum; reviews reports of Yorkshire Forward and the YH Regional Assembly; and published evidence of the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Committee.

## 2. Advancing the City-Region through the RDA

This part of the chapter focuses on the impact of the new scalar focus around the city-region in terms of the re-positioning of Yorkshire Forward and the reform of its relationship with its sub-regional partners.

### 1.1 The RDA's review of sub-regional investment planning: the context

Following the NAO's 2006 Independent Review, and as part of the 'Seven Year Review' of the organisation launched by the newly appointed Chief Executive, Yorkshire Forward set out to reform the sub-regional investment planning arrangements. Yorkshire Forward's 'Strategic Review of Investment Planning' unfolded through a period of eighteen months. In this period the evolving national city-regional agenda and related requirements came also to intersect with the unfolding Review. Before examining the details of this process and its outcomes, it is worth a brief reminder of the key national developments that underpinned the oscillating trajectory of the UK city-regional agenda and examined in chapter 6. First of all, in 2004, the significance of the Agencies was reflected in the decision to provide the RDAs with the responsibility for advancing the Northern Way strategy based on city-regions as drivers of growth in the North. Secondly, after a period dominated by uncertainty, in the run up to the 2007 SNR it became clear that the Government's preference was for a multi-scalar approach (House of Commons, 2009). Such an approach involved an increased role for local authorities and associations of local authorities (at sub-regional or city-regional level) in the terms of greater delivery of regional programmes through sub-regional arrangements and, where there was demand, the introduction of MAAs. As a result RDAs were awarded a 'strategic' governance role and new responsibilities with respect to transport, housing and planning through an Integrated Regional Strategy as well as a clear focus on improving regional economic performance (through a new single growth target). Thirdly, the (lack of) provision in the

Government's response to the consultation on the implementation of the SNR (HM Treasury, 2008) was widely interpreted as a step backwards in respect to the openings delineated in it towards greater delivery of regional programmes through sub-regional arrangements (House of Commons, 2009).

The next section begins to unpack the impact of the Government's developing approach to city-regionalism on existing relations in the YH region focusing on Yorkshire Forward's decision to review of sub-regional investment planning.

### 1.2 The RDA's review of investment planning: enabling city-regions?

Regional agents' initial reading of the developing city-regional agenda in terms of a more problematic relation to their 'space dependence' and questioning of the established status of regional resources, began to change in the run up to the SNR:

eighteen months ago ... city regions were on the ascendancy ... a lot of talk was that 'RDAs have had their day'...that is not the case now. The ascendancy of the city region is still there, because I think city-regions are a very good way to look at the dynamic of the regional economy... the Treasury has wavered in now behind regional intervention

(Yorkshire Forward, Director)

As indicated in Chapter 7, through the English RDAs network, Yorkshire Forward had been able to carve a significant power niche within the political opportunity structure of the UK government becoming thus an important interlocutor in the articulation of the terms of the new sub-national economic governance. Its position in leading the relationship with the Treasury on behalf of the Network could also be seen as reflecting, as well as further building, the political significance of the Agency itself:

the statements coming out of the Treasury recently are a bit sceptical of city-regions... on the face of it, they are not going to say we don't want city regions but



they have, Yorkshire Forward particularly, has got strong links with the Treasury because ... there are many dialogues in closed rooms.

(Government Office YH, Policy Manager)

In the region, predictably, the advancement of the city-region was met with strong opposition from non-core urban areas, places such as Bradford and Doncaster, as well as rural and coastal areas that lay outside the designated city-regions (YH Regional Assembly, 2009). Regional agents perceived this as a situation where they were no longer faced with a "united front" (Yorkshire Forward, Manager) and actively sought to exploit this to secure the RDA's imagined role as key regional driver. This can be traced in the following exchange that took place in the YH Regional Committee on 'The Work of Yorkshire Forward' between one Committee member and one of the witnesses, Tom Riordan, the Chief Executive of Yorkshire Forward:

**MP:** As a small area, is it in our interests to have a Yorkshire Forward and a Yorkshire regional office influencing developments and passing us our fair share, or for power to be passed down to local authorities where we couldn't compete with the big monsters like Sheffield and Leeds?

**Tom Riordan:** I think what you need is something in the middle, and if you look at Europe and the United States they all have something in the middle. To go from one central Government to 600-odd local authorities is too big a step. I think to go even to 43, which is what you would do if you went to city regions instead of regions, is too much, particularly in an era of decline in public funding.

**MP:** So we would get a better deal from Yorkshire Forward than under a city region approach?

**Tom Riordan:** Yes, I think you would.

(House of Commons 2009, ev. 34)

The extract above captures the concerns of some actors about a new politics of city-regionalism perceived as involving further erosion of state funds to local areas and advancement of urban areas that were already doing well at the expense of more peripheral local areas. Given the uncertainty associated with the new city-

regionalism, for many local actors the support for the existing regional approach was effectively a case of, in the words of one local authority's leader: "better the devil you know" (Leader, Local Authority).

In the meantime, conducted in 2006 and published the following year, the NAO's Independent Performance Assessment of Yorkshire Forward criticised the performance of the RDA from the perspective of limited progress in the attraction of FDI and linking regeneration intervention to competitiveness. In relation to investment planning, emphasis was placed on the need to "help partners prepare quality proposals...rationalise the number of projects [and] streamline activities" (NAO, 2007, p.7). These ideas dominated the discussions between central and regional actors on the future of the Agency and the appointment of the organisation's new Chief Executive in 2006. Led by the latter, the subsequent 'Seven Year Review' of the organisation, involved a substantial redefinition of the focus of sub-regional investment planning. One of the architects of the Review emphasised the need to "revisit prioritisation" and "the need to move away "from the notion that each local authority should have its own allocation of funding" (Director, Yorkshire Forward). For one of the Agency's Directors "asking the partnerships to agree projects at that level is something we need to re-consider" (Yorkshire Forward, Director).

The new 'Geographic Programme' approach to investment planning was implemented in the months that followed the publication of the SNR. The new system legitimated a further turn towards a managerialist framework focused on the delivery of the central target of increased growth and working through selective organisations. First of all, the shift from a project to a programme approach favoured a focus on fewer, larger scale projects with a greater potential to impact on regional economic growth (YH Regional Assembly). Secondly, the new system further undermined the role of sub-regional partnerships between different local actors in favour of an approach where each local authority had to make an economic case for investment in its own area. In the words of the Agency's Chief Executive "the important thing is the starting point", having an authority that is "very economy focused and sees the economy as a priority" (House of Commons

2009, ev. 34). No other approaches were considered as this focus was publicly presented by the Chief Executive as “inevitable, because we are a part of the world where that is the case”.

Although the implementation of the new approach was accompanied by a discourse that, in line with the SNR, emphasised the role of local authorities and greater decentralised decision making at this level, at sub-regional level, as stressed by the Regional Assembly Scrutiny Committee, there was significant uncertainty with regard to the partnership processes involving the VCS and other agencies:

[there was] confusion amongst partners from all sectors about the precise role, responsibilities and autonomy that local authorities will have ... and in particular, how they will work in partnership with other agencies in the future.

(YH Regional Assembly, 2009, p. 21)

In 2008, as the Government announced its plans for statutory city-regions, Yorkshire Forward outlined more explicitly its preference for a model of regional development that favoured, in a strategically selective sense, a focus on the largest cities within the region; Yorkshire Forward’s Draft Corporate Plan stated:

investment will take into account the agglomeration effects and economies of scale associated with development in urban centres and recognise where investment may catalyse growth in surrounding areas. This implies targeting our major investments at the region’s largest cities ...those areas that can generate more equitable economic growth.

(Yorkshire Forward, 2008 p. 24)

It is also important to stress the input of the senior members of the largest councils in this process. As they sought to further consolidate their power position and share of resources for their own areas, these agents mobilised the dominant

argument that emphasised a focus on the delivery of central targets rather than working in partnership. For example,

... we would be quite happy to sit down with Yorkshire Forward and say this is our programme for the next three years ... we have got the skills, we demonstrated we can deliver not just in terms of funding from the RDA.

(Local Authority, Councillor, SY)

As stated at the beginning of this section, regional agents' initial perception of the city-region was associated with increased insecurity for the unstable status of their space of dependence. Later however, the city-region came to be perceived more as something of an opportunity for the RDA to reinforce its position of power in the region at the expenses of other agencies. The consolidation of its links with key sectors within Whitehall proceeded alongside the attempt to exploit the divisions between different local areas that manifested in the workings of emergent city-regional partnerships. These elements seem to indicate how the city-region from a 'threat', transformed into something of an opportunity for the RDA to strengthen its position of power in the region.

The shift from regional/sub-regional arrangements to city-regional partnerships is examined in the second part of the chapter.

### **3. From Sub-regional to City-regional partnership.**

This part of the chapter shifts the focus onto the sub-regional level, considering the complex inter-agent dynamics involved in the re-positioning from a sub-regional to a wider and strengthened partnership around the Sheffield City-Region.

### 3.1. The emergence of the Sheffield City Region initiative

As indicated in chapter 4 (section 3.4), in the case of the Sheffield City Region, internal dynamics involved, beside the two RDAs also two SRPs (South Yorkshire Partnership and Alliance Sub Regional Strategic Partnership), the Peak District Planning Authority and eight local authorities (four unitary and four two tiers). Overlaying this was an array of sector based and geographic partnerships.

It is important to stress how, in the case of the SY partnership, the attempt to develop a shared economic strategy had, from the start, refrained from considering the possibility of extending the scope of collaboration beyond the area delimited by the boundaries of the SY local authorities.

Reflecting the requirements of the Northern Way Growth Strategy, as indicated in the accounts of local policy makers, levels of inter-officer activity across the regional border appeared first in 2004. When, as part of the Northern Way's submission to the 2007 Spending Review, Sheffield and other city-regions set to develop a detailed strategy or Development Programme, the city-region now figured firmly on top of Government's agenda. By this time, the prospect of additional resources coming to the area had led to the mobilisation of leaders and senior members of the councils. In particular, as indicated by respondents involved in the initiative from its early days, it was the chief executive of Sheffield City Council, Bob Kerslake, backed by the council's leader, who effectively occupied the driving seat. The latter, as confirmed by several interviewees across different agencies in SY and beyond, was considered the key figure behind the economic and physical regeneration initiatives that had taken place in Sheffield from the late 1990s. Under the leadership of Kerslake, the activities of senior members of Sheffield City Council were considered key in configuring Sheffield as a particularly proactive 'space for itself' from the late 1990s through to the mid-2000s. In this period, reflecting, and building, his power, Bob Kerslake was appointed as member of CLG's Board. In relation to this, while many interviewees emphasised his role as effective champion of the city, others, more controversially, stressed a role more akin to a 'Whitehall in the city'.

In these early stages of the developing city-regional agenda, the leadership of Sheffield City Council focused on keeping all actors 'in the game' in order to push the agenda forward. This involved attempts directed at allaying the increasing anxieties of other partners by way of emphasising continuity with the existing strategies for the sub-region. As explained by a member of the Council's Cabinet:

we know how to talk to them and we know they are suspicious, therefore we can try and avoid doing things that confirm that paranoia... they have got to see there is something in it for them...it's about that kind of negotiation and quid pro quo

(Local Authority, Councillor, SY)

The development of the city-regional agenda had revived the half-hidden traditional distrust towards Sheffield and the activities of its leadership while, more generally, nurturing local actors' perception of increased instability of their local spaces of dependence. One of the leader of the SY authorities commented:

we weren't big fans of the Sheffield City Region, one of the reasons is ... the terminology ... like 'overspill', for something to overspill it means you have to have it full, an overspill from Sheffield into Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster ... the assumption is you are going to fill Sheffield before that happens.

(Local Authority, Leader, SY)

It is worth considering more closely the peculiar stance of Doncaster as the only SY authority with an elected mayor. In particular, while the mayor apparently opposed the idea of a city-regional strategy and refrained from taking part in meetings and discussions around it, officers continued to work on their parent department's briefings:

in the past couple of years, [Doncaster] has engaged more but on an officer level, not at a political level ...I have authority to engage with other officers in the city-region and to work with them so that's what I do...what the politicians do is another matter, at least now I can do my job..

Where previous significant experience of collaboration did not exist, as indicated in the accounts of respondents from the East Midlands authorities, the leadership of Sheffield City Council, sought new one to one informal contacts with their counterparts on the other side of the regional border. In this case, with little or no knowledge of agendas, concerns and personalities, space was provided for the contribution of input and proposals.

All the leaders of the component authorities signed up to a city-regional economic strategy, the Sheffield City Region Development Programme, in 2006, which comprised four priority interventions. First, developing knowledge and research on an internationally competitive scale; second, developing a comprehensive connectivity strategy; third, providing the skills required by an internationally competitive economy; and finally, creating an environment to encourage investment and a higher quality of life (SYP, 2006).

However, the strategy also acknowledged the presence of barriers to growth; that economic activity rates were “patchy” and mobility depended on addressing specific barriers in deprived communities “including public transport, childcare and ‘bridging learning to Learners’” (p. 18). It highlighted also the need to address a skills mismatch and to target the most deprived communities “to better connect them to the larger pool of jobs and services across the region” (p.24).

This burgeoning agenda immediately brought into play a set of levers and drivers that lay firmly outside the control of city-regional agents. Similarly to what was stated in relation to the regional strategy in chapter 4 (section 3.5), the Development Programme carried little programmatic value as it worked more as a political tool to keep all significant actors in the game as decisions on the city-regional agenda was still taking form.

### 3.2. Building a MAA for SY

Following the submission of the Development Programme the leaders and the senior members of the councils focused on the definition of governance arrangements for advancing the city-regional strategy. In the course of 2006 it became clear that Central Government was not contemplating imposing formal city-regions. As confirmed by interviews with local officers, the recognition that the initiative would now advance within the framework of existing practices and politics of local governance had a reassuring effect vis-à-vis some of the most pressing anxieties of local actors. The Sheffield City Region Forum was formed in these circumstances as a grouping of the Leaders of the component local authorities<sup>22</sup>.

Many at local level perceived the on-going uncertainty with regard to powers and resources available to the city-region as a familiar state strategy where, as observed by the leader of one of the South Yorkshire authorities,

Government has a knack of sending things down with no money, knowing you won't be able to sort it out so they can take it back ... it's decentralization but really is centralization.

(Local Authority, Leader, SY).

In the accounts of the majority of local agents the presence of significant barriers that inhibited the development of effective partnership working across the city-region reflected inconsistencies incorporated in the wider policy framework, for example:

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<sup>22</sup>In the aftermath of its constitution, decision making within the Forum concentrated around the development of internal rules and mechanisms focused on reducing conflict between member local authorities. This involved negotiations around voting provisions, the appointment of an independent chair, financial arrangements supporting a Sheffield City Region officers' team and the modalities through which to engage other agencies and stakeholders. Martin Havenhand, a former Chief Executive of Yorkshire Forward with a background of local authority working in both South Yorkshire and East Midlands was appointed Chair of the SCR Forum.



Government should have taken the lead and say 'we see this as leading towards a whole new structure of government with real power being devolved to organisations and institutions that operate over the city region' and with money following that...but if people are being asked to collaborate and a lot of the money and the power and the decision making lies outside their control is going to be difficult to get them to collaborate.

(SRP Unit, Executive, East Derbyshire)

The tensions that emerged in the attempts to develop new, networked city-regional arrangements should certainly be understood in relation to issues of policy design and thus the role of extra-local actors and interests<sup>23</sup>. However, it is important to stress also how some interviewees questioned the extent to which the senior members of the councils intended to work through more inclusive networked arrangements. For example, in the words of one the senior officers appointed to coordinate the activities of the Forum: "the leaders of the councils see [the Forum] as their own initiative, they want to drive it, they want to lead it...and are determined to keep it that way" (SRP Unit, Manager, SY). In line with the multi-scalar framework applied here it is important therefore to consider also the interaction between the emergent framework and existing local and sub-regional arrangements and strategies.

Interviews with sub-regional and local actors highlighted another critical element of the shifting policy environment in which the Forum was developing, that is the 'phasing out' of Structural Funds support for the area as the new, reduced, transitional programme was being launched in 2007. As said in Chapter 7, the temporary status as Objective 1 area, provided the SY sub-region, or the forces that claimed to represent, with significant levels of funding and political capacity.

Concerns for the increased vulnerability of their scalar dependence upon EU Structural Funds played an important role in shaping the positioning of SY leaders in the discussions with central government on the new city-regional governance

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<sup>23</sup> Particularly relevant for the Sheffield City-Region was how the initiative developed in a context where the city-regional agenda required the integration with the strand of work around the transitional Structural Funds Programme for the 2007-2013 period and the fact that the responsibility and management of the Programme was moving to the RDA was effectively ignored.

arrangements. Such positioning was thus oriented towards negotiating with central government the terms of the transition away from Objective 1. These shifting circumstances can explain the extent to which local agents perceived increasing pressures from the centre, through their local MPs, related to the idea that, in order to avoid 'missing out' with respect to other areas, there was the need to "forget about governance nonsense and address the economic agenda" (Local Authority, Councillor). The Chief Executive of one of the East Midlands authorities described a process in where:

there was a strategy document about that tick, the Leader of [one other SY authorities] said 'forget the strategy, let's just pick two, three or four things we can all agree are important' ... we came away here in Derbyshire... we came up with our 6 or 8 things...

(Local Authority, Chief Executive, East Midlands)

In line with a focus oriented more towards the delivery of the 'economic agenda' local agents perceived that the existing SRP model was inadequate as they recognised the need for a more strategic form of executive management around the city-region, or, in the words of the Chief Executive of one of the councils, focusing "collaboration at high, strategic level". The SYP held its last meeting in July 2007 and subsequently was dismantled and replaced by the Forum with the key implication that the leaders of the councils now taking exclusive control of the Board.

This was perceived as a situation where senior members of the councils desired a smaller board to better pursue their own priorities at the expense of those of other agencies and sectors: a senior official of Yorkshire Forward's SY office, articulated this in terms of "you could see this as the icing on the cake... [other agencies] don't even get a seat at the table" (Yorkshire Forward, Sub-regional Manager).

Chapter 7 discussed the significance of the CED component of SY's economic strategies and how some VCS organisations had been able to secure particularly favourable positioning at both board and officers' level in the context of the SYP. As indicated by interviews with members of VCS organisations in SY, concerns

were raised that limiting involvement of the sector at strategic level would reduce legitimacy and representativeness. The dominant understanding however seemed to be one that emphasised the circumstances of the fiscal 'cliff edge' for the sector and how VCS organisations pursued their own agenda. In this respect it was stated that expanding the membership of the Board to VCS would have resulted in the initiative "getting bogged down on partnership" (Local Authority, Chief Executive).

More in general, the councils seemed to support a shift in strategic policy direction of the area that was more in line with the attempt of central government's forces to promote a greater focus on the link between regeneration strategies and competitiveness (presumably at the expenses of other dimensions) at local level:

[this initiative] is about the key elements that provide economic prosperity... it's not something that drills down into community, neighbourhood level, local level ...if it was a reform of the way Local Government is organised you would ask questions about its democratic credentials but it seems to be an initiative where existing institutions collaborate to add value in some areas, these tend to be located at a high level ... we haven't identified areas of activity that would be particularly relevant for that sector... so at the moment there isn't a high degree of involvement, I'm not quite sure there'd be in the near future.

(SRP Unit, Executive, East Derbyshire)

Senior members of the councils thus seemed to be favoured by and supported an interpretation of the city-region as an arena for discussing predominantly larger scale economic projects as part of their attempt to gain advantage over other agencies perceived as competitors with respect to limited state resources.

Awareness of their level of financial 'lock in' associated with the EU Structural Funds can be seen as playing a part in shaping the positioning of the SY leaders in the negotiations with the Government's evolving city-regional agenda.

The SY leaders sought to exploit the opportunity provided by the new scalar policy in order to negotiate the transition away from Objective 1. The focus was on existing initiatives, principally physical infrastructural projects supported by the councils that required additional or alternative funding. This was effectively

encapsulated in the MAA proposal. Among the seven that were fast-tracked by Government in July 2008, this encompassed the existing 'Transform South Yorkshire' partnership established by the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder and which therefore had funding and an institutional form going back until 2004.

It is suggested that while addressing concerns in relation to the increased scalar vulnerability vis-à-vis the EU scale, local actors might be producing a re-adjustment in the order of their scalar dependencies, in terms of information and resources, further in favour of central government.

Perhaps even more crucially, these movements were taking place under a cloud of uncertainty in relation to the extent to which and how city-regions would become more important as an arena for the distribution of economic development funding. In relation to this, for example, a senior officer involved in advancing the activities of the city-regional partnership noted that serious questions remained with regard to the extent to which there was "going to be enough to bind these people together" (SRP Unit, Executive, East Midlands).

### 3.3. A City Development Company for the knowledge city-region

One of the first undertakings of the Sheffield City Region partnership was to commission a study to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the 'knowledge economy' in the area. It is useful to provide here a short reminder of what was said in chapter 4 (section 3.4) in relation to the economic challenges that this old industrial area was still facing in the mid-2000s. After the steep decline in unemployment that characterized the period between 1981 and 1991, in successive decades employment replacement occurred but tended to be based in retail, hotels and construction. Research conducted by Dabinett (2004, 2005) highlighted how, in contrast to the era of steel and manufacturing, with high paid, highly skilled jobs for life, new opportunities have been more precarious and often based on part-time, low-paid insecure contracts. As a measure of the prosperity of the area, Figure 2 shows the values of workplace based GVA per capita of the

city-region as a share of the UK total for the period 1991-2010. It indicates that from 1999 this grew at a steady rate of about one percentage point per year until 2002-03 and slightly more slowly in the subsequent two years. However in 2006-07 the city-region's share of GVA per capita remained lower than at the beginning of the previous decade and below 80 per cent of the UK total. This gives an indication of how the growth in employment in the past two decades has not necessarily coincided with a relative increase in prosperity of the economy of the area. The Sheffield City Region Development Programme, within an overall orientation on growth and competitiveness, recognised the challenges related economic activity rates that remained stubbornly below the UK average and the on-going skills mismatch; it also acknowledged the existence of specific barriers in deprived communities (SYP and Alliance Sub Regional Strategic Partnership, 2006).

On the initiative of the leadership of Sheffield City Council a study on "Priorities for Sheffield City Region in the Knowledge Economy" was commissioned from the influential 'think tank' the Work Foundation. The latter had played an important role in shaping, and giving voice to, the orientation of the UK city-regionalism<sup>24</sup>, advocating the city-region (or 'Ideopolis') as the most effective spatial unit for the wider spread of the knowledge economy (Jones et al., 2006). The Work Foundation's 2006 'Ideopolis' report included a case study of Sheffield which established that the city lacked the critical mass of knowledge industries required to activate virtuous processes of agglomeration and from these to spread growth in the wider hinterland. Another more recent analysis conducted by the Work Foundation (with the Centre for Cities and SURF) (2009) of the economic linkages in the Northern cities (based on an analysis of commuters flows), furthered this interpretation describing the Sheffield City region as 'weakly mono-centric':

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<sup>24</sup> A statement from the then Minister of Communities and Local Government accompanied the launch of the report: "I think that our challenge in Britain is ...to take inspiration from some of the ideas that are being developed by local authorities and their partners around the country, but are also being developed by think tanks like The Work Foundation" (Jones et al. p.2).

While poly-centricity has been identified as one of the key strengths of the Greater South East and mono-centricity has led to economic benefits in the Manchester City Region, Sheffield City Region... is not classed as polycentric because Sheffield is not a strong enough centre to be having an impact on neighbouring areas, but it is only weakly mono-centric because not all areas in the city region are benefitting from Sheffield's success...

(p. 22)

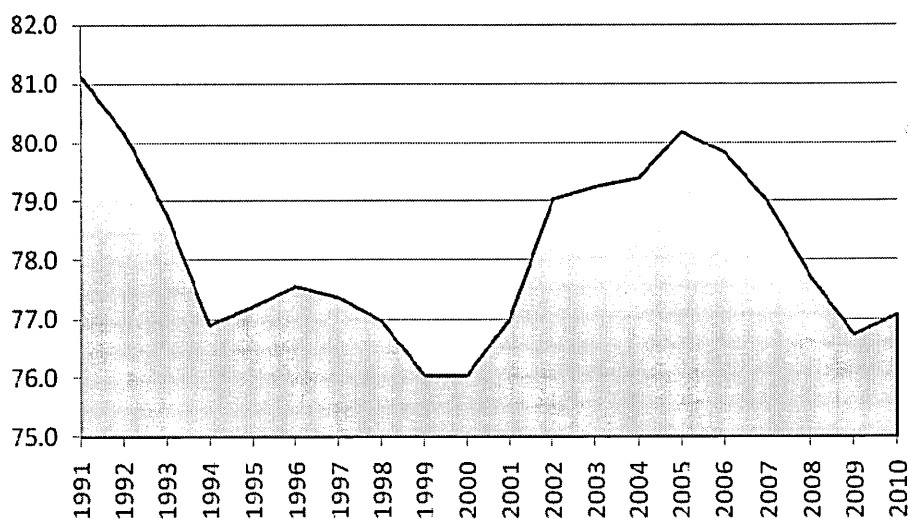
In the area however, the implication descending from this interpretation that future investment should be targeted to building up the knowledge base of the core urban area was politically untenable. As seen in chapter 7, existing economic strategies for the sub-region emphasised 'polycentric development', an approach that had contributed towards a balanced distribution of economic activity across the "dispersed conurbation" (Idea-Smith Consulting Partnership, 2004). It is useful to remember how this approach emerged after considerable negotiation where, in line with Lipietz's (1994) work on 'regional armatures' and 'as eloquently put by Richardson and Dabinett (2005, p.123) '... generating new spatial diagrams of a polycentric sub-region served to create a lightning rod for a re-territorialised politics'".

The tension between the 'knowledge city-region' model and the need to retain the voluntary collaboration of all the component authorities in order to push the agenda forward shaped the consultants' brief. The latter incorporated the provision that recommendations would be a-spatial, effectively postponing decisions to negotiations between actors with a stake in it<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup>The requirement for the voluntary participation of all local authorities shaped for example the study's analysis of the geographical distribution of inequalities, 'smoothing over' differences within and across the city-region and, the argument that "no city or city-region is without deprived communities facing significant challenges and SCR is not an exception" (Jones et al, 2006, p.86).

**Figure 2: Sheffield City Region workplace based GVA (current basic prices) as UK %**



Source: Experian REM (2010), ONS (2008)

Sheffield was the first of a group of city-regions and, significantly, also non-urban sub-regions (such as North Staffordshire, for example), which hired the Work Foundation to gain "insight into how the knowledge economy works ...and into the policy levers that facilitate knowledge-based cities and knowledge-based growth (Jones et al., 2007, p.8). This was reflected in the transmission of similarities in the orientation to each city-region (see also Boland, 2007). The input of consultants therefore underscored an important set of 'horizontal' connections across the different city-regional partnerships, operating through professional networks and connections that may also draw in government officials (Allen and Cochrane 2007). As suggested above, Sheffield City Council was particularly prompt in seeking to engage with a recognised 'name' in the field such as the Work Foundation. This can be seen as signalling the particular favourable positioning of its leaders within the networks above. Here it might be useful to reconsider the significance of the position of the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council, Bob Kerlake who, by this time, had become an influential member of a key ministerial Board.

As stated earlier in the Chapter (section 3.1), many interviewees considered this agent a champion of the city within Whitehall, stressing the endeavour to exploit the opportunities available to him as a credible leader of the city to 'jump scale', projecting this beyond its territorial boundaries. For others instead, the leadership of Sheffield played a role more akin to a 'Whitehall in the city', focused mostly on delivering central targets in the area. Here Cox's (1998) scheme can assist in developing a more complex interpretation, one that considers the interaction between agency and structure oriented factors. This can be particularly useful for exploring the endeavour to produce new governance arrangements to move towards the implementation of the "Priorities for Sheffield City Region in the Knowledge Economy". The proposal developed and advanced by the leadership of Sheffield City Council involved the establishment of a new economic agency or City Development Company (CDC) that would cover the whole city-region. Creative Sheffield was established as the Government's pilot city-wide CDC in 2007 (CLG, 2006a) but its conversion into a city-regional economic agency never materialised.

A new urban project of a new citywide economic agency emerged originally within the city back in early 2006, as an expression of a wider coalition and desire to overcome some of the constraints of the previous intra-city Urban Regeneration Company (URC) model rolled-out across local areas in the UK from 1999<sup>26</sup>. The new urban policy tool was conceived as a means to expand the narrow sectoral and geographical focus of the existing approach and promote a more inclusive one that would "benefit the whole of Sheffield...not just the regeneration of the city centre but also the neighbourhoods to keep the population on board" (Local Authority, Councillor). At the same time there were clear tensions between these proposals and the arguments for which the key measure of the success of regeneration policies in the city was the capacity to attract more foreign capital investment and knowledge intensive or "blue chip companies" (Local Authority, Councillor). In

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<sup>26</sup>URCs were established following Lord Rogers' 1999 Urban Task Force (1999) report which was commissioned by the incoming Labour Government to identify the causes of urban decline in England and recommended solutions to bring people back into cities and establish a vision for urban regeneration.



relation to the latter argument, the leadership of Sheffield perceived increasing pressures related to the idea that the area was seen prevalently as 'old economy' within government and would be 'missing out' with respect to perceived rivals and legitimised 'drivers of growth', Manchester and Leeds in the context of the developing city-regional agenda. Here thus we can begin to better identify also increasing pressures bearing on the existing sub-regional alliance; one of the Sheffield City Council's cabinet members, for example, observed, "in Sheffield we can do the same as Manchester but Sheffield is not going to achieve that economic transformation on its own... we see our critical mass could be the city-region" (Local Authority, Councillor, SY). With the establishment of the pilot citywide CDC, Creative Sheffield ultimately reflected the interaction between first, the developing appetite of central government for a model competitive knowledge city-region and the political activity of the coalition driven by the Council's Chief Executive. This was conducted on the back of increased concerns in relation to their scalar dependence and perceived disadvantage with respect to other cities in the region and beyond perceived as rivals. A policy officer from the economic team emphasised the leadership of the Chief Executive in the context of these central-local relations:

Creative Sheffield... that was Bob driving that, he's so tapped in within Government, he knows what's going to be happening, he know what policy is going to be coming up... he wants to make sure we are not missing that trick.

(Local Authority, Officer, SY)

Government's growing enthusiasm for knowledge city-regions articulated with first, the political activism of the urban elite coalition led by the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council and second, the concerns for their scalar dependencies related to perceived pressures to 'catch up with the legitimated 'drivers of growth'. The opposition to the CDC from other local agents in the rest of the city-regional arena and the way the proposal 'kept coming up' indicated that the trajectory of the Sheffield City Region initiative was caught between different interests and models of the city-region.

Strongly opposed by the other SY leaders, this proposal was perceived as an attempt to forge city-regional governance arrangements that would support the advancement of an agenda that was further advantageous towards the core city elite:

we are all very conscious that cities have got an agenda of their own, they actually meet separately and in Sheffield... they have discussions with Ministers and they talked about Creative Sheffield, the suggestion of Creative Sheffield moving into Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster was killed, as far as we were concerned, from day one. But it keeps coming up ...

(Local Authority Leader, SY)

The prospect of ending this stalemate seemed to materialise with the announcement on pilot city-regions in November 2008.

### 3.4 The Sheffield City Region Pilot Proposal

As suggested in the previous section, the construction of a new city-regional partnership took place under the cloud of uncertainty of the oscillating trajectory of the city-regional agenda. Interviews highlighted how significant lack of clarity in relation to if and how city-regions would become more important as an arena for the distribution of economic development funding. This reflected in a perception of 'better the devil you know' among the majority city-regional actors. The government's 2008 pre-budget announcement and the invitation to prospective city-region to put forward their case was issued against this backdrop of tensions and uncertainties and, even more importantly perhaps, did little to address them. This resulted in a statutory city-regional proposal submitted to Government in 2009 that was supported only by the senior members of six councils.

Following the failure to obtain pilot status, discussions with Ministers focused on the actions needed in order to exploit opportunities that might emerge in the future. The dominant interpretation of the failure of the Sheffield City Region proposal

focused almost exclusively on the weaknesses internal to the partnership environment and the argument that not enough had been done to modify the perception of the area as 'old economy'.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the impact of the developing politics of city-regionalism on the regional/sub-regional relations examined in Chapter 7. Overlaid on a regional/sub-regional infrastructure that sat on already shaky foundations, the city-region added a further level of uncertainty for governance actors. The advent of the new city-regional framework in part signified the recognition of those tensions documented in particular in the case of the RDA and the SY 'regional armatures'. Equally, the city-regional framework advanced by the UK government involved the further bolstering of existing regional governance.

The initial reading of the developing city-regional agenda in terms of a problematic relation to their 'space dependence', threatening powers and resources of the RDAs, was increasingly faded as Yorkshire Forward, as part of the English RDAs networks, consolidated its role as an important interlocutor of central government in articulating the terms of regional policy. Another important ingredient of the policy milieu was the uncertainty associated with the shift from SRPs to city-regional partnerships as the RDA could exploit a widespread perception at sub-regional level of 'better the devil you know' to consolidate its imagined role as key regional driver.

The RDA's response to the emergent agenda displayed the extent of institutional lock-in and the strength of perceived structures in the field. Through the reform of sub-regional investment planning the Agency sought to move arrangements further towards a managerial framework concerned with being 'outcome-focused' towards the national growth target and working through selective agents.

In general, rather than the presence of regional arrangements per se, what is significant in relation to the prospect of the emergence trajectories of networked

governance around the city-region is the extent to which regional arrangements were configured as a form of state-led regionalism (and this configuration remained intact in the subsequent processes).

While SRP bodies such as the SYP had genuine organic roots, the arrangements promoted by key leaders at local and regional level in response to the requirements of the developing regional agendas have a potential for re-opening earlier geographical and sectoral fractures.

An interpretation of MAA is as an arena for negotiation of large-scale economic projects favoured and supported by senior members of the councils as these sought to consolidate their power at the expenses of other agencies and the VCS. The negotiation of the transition away from Objective 1 proceeded alongside a re-adjustment of the order of scalar dependencies in terms of information and resources, one that granted sectors of Whitehall even greater control over the sub-regional strategies.

As they developed in a cloud of uncertainty with regards to if and how the city-region would become more important as an arena for the allocation of economic development funding, these emergent arrangements were fraught with tensions. The analysis considered the political construction of a city-regional CDC in 2006/07. The government's growing enthusiasm for knowledge city-regions articulated with firstly, the political activism of the urban elite coalition led by the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council; secondly, the concerns for their scalar dependencies related to perceived pressures to 'catch up' with the legitimated 'drivers of growth' in the North, and finally, the additional pressures related to the phasing out of EU Structural Funds.

The opposition to the CDC from other local agents in the rest of the city-regional arena and the way the proposal 'kept coming up' indicated that the trajectory of the Sheffield City Region initiative was caught between different interests and models of the city-region.

However, going forward, it will be key to decipher which models will be retained, and orienting the trajectory of institutionalization of the city-region. The direction of processes could perhaps be seen as beginning to take form in the discussions

with Ministers that followed the failed Sheffield City Region pilot proposal; giving very little indication of a 'fresh start' these were dominated by the argument that not enough had been done on addressing the perception of the area as old economy.

# 9. Conclusion and Discussion

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## 1. Introduction

This research has explored the politically charged processes behind the formation of a particular regional space, the YH region in England, and its transformation in connection with the advancement of city-regional governance. This chapter reflects on the aims of the research, its key findings and implications, placing the analysis within a wider theoretical context whilst also considering the potential limitations and identifying useful avenues for future research.

## 2. Aim and Objectives

In the introduction to the thesis I set out the following basic aim:

- to explore the multi-scalar and multi-dimensional re-production of a particular regional space, leading to some advancement in the knowledge of state space.

Beyond this broad aim the following objectives are identified.

### Objectives:

- to examine the interaction between regional and sub-regional scales focusing on how, in this interaction, some ideas, strategies and institutions are 'selected' and others discarded.

- to explore the significance of path-dependency or of the orientation of existing institutions in relation to the realisation of new institutional initiatives.
- to develop a set of dimensions that can be utilised as a framework for exploring new regional spaces so as to contribute to the advancement of an 'enriched' state space approach more sensitive to contingency and politics.

In essence, this study set to contribute to advance knowledge of new state spaces developing an empirically rich, theoretically driven analysis of a particular regional space through which shed light on *how* actors, institutions, scales, networks, agency and structures interact in the production of new geographies of governance. Furthermore, it has integrated existing perspectives on the new regionalism and the new centrally-led regional institutions by exploring their significance in relation to existing sub-regional and local policies and coalitions.

The endeavour to fully amend the inadequacies of new regionalism's techno-economic interpretations of the 'rise of the region' drove, first, an engagement with Brenner's spatialised SRA to state space and, second, the search for a more 'flexible' formulation of the latter. The strengths of the SRA approach for this study pertain to its distinction between 'state spatial projects' and 'state spatial strategies' and the emphasis on the temporal dimension of state rescaling, an aspect which is underplayed in regional accounts produced from a relational perspective. The weakness of Brenner's approach concerns its limited conceptual and analytic grasp of issues of political agency and struggle involved in shaping particular regional spaces. Developing further the indications provided by MacLeod (1999, also MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999), assistance to address this weakness came from Cox's (1998) ideas around a 'politics of scale' in connection with Lipietz (1994) work on 'regional armatures' or 'coalitions'. In practice, these notions serve to anchor the abstract modelling prevalent in the writing of Brenner, and other

scholars in the political economy of scale tradition, to actual spaces, initiatives and institutions. This enriched SRA informs the brand of 'concrete' second wave regionalist research developed in this study. The reconsideration of the position of intensive case-study research in relation to the critical realist paradigm provided the methodological foundations for developing the empirically rich, theoretically driven, multi-scalar and multi-dimensional regional analysis necessary for advancing knowledge of state space.

The YH region and the Sheffield City Region (SCR) defined an apt site of research for highlighting the historically embedded nature of state spatial restructuring. Research conducted in the region noted how, prior to 1999, a fragmented polity characterised by dispersed urban and sub-regionally based policy networks appeared to give way to embryonic levels of regionalisation in connection with the instalment of the new GOYH (Bache, 1999). If the policy developed by the Labour Party in opposition first, and in its first years in Government later, reinforced the momentum of such tendencies, other developments, such as the conferment of Objective 1 status to South Yorkshire, strengthened underlying contradictory tendencies, reinforcing close-knit networks and territorially defined identities at sub-regional and local level. Thus, unique circumstances that have led to characterise the YH as an especially 'hybrid region' (Lee, 2000) underlined a case choice and design based on its explanatory power in relation to the key dimensions of the study's theoretical framework rather than on criteria of 'typicality'.

### **3. Research Findings**

The research account developed in this thesis demonstrated processes of formation and transformation of regional geographies of governance that are multidimensional in nature, characterised by tensions produced through the interplay between inherited and emergent institutional arrangements and with political agency and ideological resources as an important causal factor working beyond material circumstances. A number of issues were brought into focus in the



analysis, from the extent to which the RDA constituted 'regionally orchestrated centralism' through to the appearance of a form of 'scalar chaos'. At the forefront of this was an overarching understanding that beyond a rhetoric of integrated development, attempts to forge new sub-national governance arenas for debating place specific development strategies were overcrowded with the on-going struggles pertaining to the reconfiguration of the English state, the shape of sub-national scalar boundaries and patterns of redistributive (in-)justice.

### 3.1 The political construction of the region

Chapter 7 analysed the struggles that emerged following the establishment of the new RDA state project in the YH region.

Contradictions characterising the governance of regional development delivery were not simply an expression of the difficulties in absorbing extant local institutional circumstances and practices in the emergent trajectory of the regional project. The research account demonstrated the significance of the region as a site of political contestation. For example, as governance problems emerged often Yorkshire Forward and sub-regional agents framed these in different ways to calibrate governance arrangements in a way that would assist them in consolidating their position of power in the region.

The analysis provided insights on the significance of path-dependencies. It showed, in line with Cox's (1998) scheme, that a concern with preserving their local spaces of dependence oriented sub-regional agents towards the acquisition and short-term delivery of regional funding rather than on strategic partnership working. However, governance tensions stemmed largely from contradictions incorporated in the emergent reform project. These derived from the way in which the state sought to retain control over the governance of economic development which essentially reduced the RDAs to weak economic agencies and were successively compounded by the path-dependent actions of sub-regional agents. This indicates the need to modify those political-economic perspectives that focus

on the significance of path-dependencies to explain the contradictions incorporated in the emergent spaces of neo-liberalisation. Path-dependencies therefore can be seen as a source of tensions and contradictions; their significance however should be examined in association with the actual (in-) consistencies of emergent strategies and practices.

The analysis contributed to move beyond the majority of views that tended to conceive the centrally-led regional agencies as either individual agencies or, emphasising their structural as component, as a collective. Adopting a perspective focused on the impact on sub-regional regeneration politics and policies shedding empirical light on the RDA as 'politics of scale'.

It showed that as the RDA sought to live up to its responsibility emphasising independence and opportunities it appeared somewhat in thrall to the demands of its sub-regional partners. Later, given the reality of its constraints, the need to ensure conditions for growth in its regional space of dependence, the Agency turned to increasingly interventionist strategies in the sub-regions.

These strategies involved first, the mobilisation of a discourse that emphasised the link between regeneration and competitiveness (and delegitimised the existing interpretation of regeneration); second the delivery of an increasing number of economic projects directly through the Agency's central office.

In understanding this emphasis was placed on the interaction between a developing policy context and the strategies of the RDA as this sought to gain increased control over organisations that were perceived as 'rivals'. An increasing number of national programmes were channelled through the RDAs, as Yorkshire Forward had been able to carve a significant power niche within the UK state apparatus through the English RDAs network and its role in leading, on behalf of the latter, relations with the Treasury.

In the region, the Agency could often bypass the sub-regions to deliver directly some projects considered critical for delivering its centrally set priorities and filled perceived 'gaps' in the sub-regional investment plans.

Such perceived 'gaps' above point to some differences with respect to accounts of 'regionally orchestrated centralism' where RDAs are seen as capable of exercising

control over the sub-regions. The case study suggests instead the difficulty of providing such clear-cut reading without engaging more thoroughly with the different contours of sub-regional institutions and strategies.

If regional sub-regional tensions concentrated particularly around the sub-regional structures and strategies of SY and the, the analysis showed that in SY and in the Humber tensions evolved in different ways: in the Humber the RDA could impose new arrangements more favourable to the realisation of its own agenda, in SY the influence of the RDA was almost neutralised.

The Humber represented a fragmented political-institutional landscape that lacked the institutional coherence and identity for which SY could be characterised as a 'space for itself'. The analysis brought into focus multiple axes of tensions. Those between regional/sub-regional programmes, clear in the actions of Yorkshire Forward and the Humber Forum, co-existed with the tensions between the different localities and interests within the sub-region.

The dominant discourse that constructed the problems of the area in terms that emphasised endogenous weaknesses, at the expenses of wider political and economic processes, favoured and was supported by the RDA as this sought to neutralise agencies perceived as 'rivals'. This points once again to the importance to seriously explore the ideology of 'place' and 'region' in the structuration of regional governance.

Ultimately, the impact of the RDA on the area, rather than moderating tensions and favouring collaboration between different interests and localities, showed the potential for further bolstering conflicts over the location of economic activity.

The notion of 'space for itself' was especially useful for characterising the SY sub-region and bring attention on the forces that had come together in an 'armature' generating the capacity and legitimacy that enabled them to claim to represent the interest of the area as a whole (Lipietz, 1994; MacLeod, 1999). In relation to the tensions that emerged with the RDA the analysis emphasised to aspects of the sub-regional institutions and interests

In SY, interaction with existing sub-regional arrangements and strategies 'moulded' investment planning in four 'mini' investment plans, one for each LSP and

incorporated a significant CED component ensuring continuity with SRB funding and Structural Funds. Opportunities for engagement that allowed the SY 'regional armature' to lobby effectively to neutralise some of the RDA's policies in conflict with its agenda, in particular, where this concerned a more balanced distribution of economic activity, were strongly influenced by the (co-)existence of the Objective 1 regime. In their role as the force behind the political constitution of the SY 'regional armature' and the successful engagement with the EU for funding, the SY leaders were certainly more advantaged than their counter-parts in other areas in gaining a wider audience for their instances. At the same time, Ministers were too aware of the need to facilitate rather than constrain the flow of EU regional aid to the area, favouring regeneration partnerships based on alliances of local authorities in the sub-region as main partnership vehicle in the area.

Therefore, rather than a process of 'regionally orchestrated centralism', where the RDA is seen as being able to control the sub-regions, this research emphasises the difficulty of providing such clear cut reading of the struggles taking place in the YH region. This is not equivalent to arguing that the RDA was powerless nor that 'regionally orchestrated centralism' did not occur in other regions. However the question of the ability certain local or sub-regional leaders to exploit opportunities that might be open to them as the representative of the interests of particular spaces to 'jump scale' and win resources in the face of competition from less progressive alliances seems certainly worth of greater attention.

In the case examined here opportunities for engagement are connected to the temporary role of the SY leaders in the context of the EU Objective 1 regime. This seems to corroborate an understanding of spaces of engagement as being regulated by particular conjunctural windows; these provide local actors the opportunity to temporarily reach a wider audience. In other words, strategy is curtailed by the strength of social forces at a particular time.

### 3.3 The city-region and the re-construction of the region

The advent of the new city-regional framework in part signified the recognition of the tensions documented in particular in the case of the RDA and the SY 'regional armatures'. Equally, the city-regional frameworks advanced by the UK government involved the further bolstering of the existing regional governance. While the SRP bodies such as the SYP had genuine organic roots, the arrangements promoted by key leaders at local and regional level in response to the requirements of the developing regional agendas have a potential for re-opening earlier fractures at sub-regional level.

The initial reading of the developing city-regional agenda in terms of a problematic relation to their 'space dependence', threatening powers and resources of the Agency, was increasingly faded as Yorkshire Forward, as part of the English RDAs networks, continued to perform as an important interlocutor of central government in articulating the terms of the new regional policy. In the region, the Agency sought to exploit the conditions of uncertainty at sub-regional level, associated with the shift from city-regional to sub-regional partnership, to strengthen its imagined role as key regional driver.

The RDA's response to the emergent agenda displayed the extent of institutional lock-in and the strength of perceived structures in the field. Through the reform of investment planning arrangements were moved further towards a managerial framework concerned with being 'outcome-focused' towards the national growth target and working through selective agents. Rather the presence of regional arrangements per se, what is significant in relation to the advancement of new forms of networked governance around the city-region is whether these develop alongside existing regional arrangements and the extent to which these were configured as a form of state-led regionalism (and such configuration remained intact in the subsequent processes).

In the meantime in the sub-region the advancement of an interpretation of MAA as an arena for negotiations around large scale economic projects favoured and was supported by senior members of the councils as these sought to consolidate their

power at the expenses of other agencies and the VCS. The negotiation of the transition away from Objective 1 proceeded alongside a re-adjustment of in the order of scalar dependencies in terms of information and resources one that granted sectors of Whitehall even greater control over the sub-regional strategies. Advancing under a cloud of uncertainty in relation to if and how the city-region would become more important as an arena for the distribution of economic development funding, these arrangements were fraught with tensions.

The analysis focused in particular those that centred around the distinctive role of the elite coalition driving Sheffield City Council and the parallel attempt at building a CDC around the Sheffield City Region. It stressed how Government's growing appetite for competitive knowledge city-regions articulated with first, the political activism of the urban elite coalition led by the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council and second, the concerns for their scalar dependencies related to perceived pressures to 'catch up' with the legitimated 'drivers of growth'. The opposition to the CDC from other local agents and the way the proposal 'kept coming up' indicated that the trajectory of the Sheffield City Region initiative was effectively caught between different interests and models.

The suspension of the notion of its sustainability allowed for tangled hierarchies of state policies with time to become more entrenched, nurturing its own weaknesses. These are encapsulated in the oscillations that from the mid-2000s marked the trajectory of the UK city-regional agenda with the 'variation and selection' of multiple city-regional ideas, interests and models. In looking beyond this, to the successive institutional movements, it will be important to consider which models are 'retained and institutionalised'. This process could perhaps be seen as beginning to take form in the discussions with Ministers that followed the failed Sheffield City Region pilot proposal; giving very little indication of a 'fresh start', these focused on the endogenous problems of the partnership and the argument that not enough had been done on addressing the perception of the area as 'old economy'.

## 4. Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This section outlines the theoretical and methodological contributions of the research.

This study developed what I defined as a brand of 'concrete' 'second wave' new regionalist research. Through the engagement with Cox's formulation of the 'politics of scale' and other additional notions it was possible to hold on to the strengths of the state-space approach while at the same time pursuing a more 'flexible' formulation, sensitive to issues of political agency and struggle in relation to particular spaces. This conceptual re-formulation has been accompanied by methodological reflection around the role of concrete forms of enquiry for demonstrating and advancing knowledge of the new regional state spaces.

### 4.1 An enriched State Space Approach for analysing urban and regional governance

In this study the value of Brenner's state space approach emerged with particular clarity in relation to its capacity to bring attention to the temporal dimension of state restructuring through its concern with the institutional legacies inscribed on state space. These structural influences are inevitably underestimated in relational accounts of regional spaces where the impulse to characterise space as open and fluid means that, prior to its constitution, state space presents something of a blank slate to actor-networks. Where traditionally the state space approach applied here shows limitations is in relation to its focus on macro-change and an inadequate theoretical and analytical grasp of the issues of political agency and struggle in particular in relation to the shaping of specific regional spaces. The expanded state spatial approach outlined and applied in this thesis highlights the importance of analysing the political dimension of state restructuring and the re-making of political agency and associated spaces of dependence and engagement on a field structured by spatially uneven development.

To merely assert the trajectory of the YH region as an outcome of some ineluctable structural transition to a post-Fordist economy and hollowed out state will tell us little about the political construction and institutional shaping of any emerging map of urban and regional governance. In order to understand the uneven and eccentric contours of the latter, we would be well advised to explore the determinate social relations and 'politics of scale' that serve to activate particular instances of the new regionalism.

In other words, in line the SRA: "only in specific places and times is it possible to observe the meeting of the general and the particular, with politics being an historical construction, of people making their own history albeit never under conditions of their own choosing"(Jenson, 1991, cited in MacLeod, p.248)

The analysis in thesis brings the attention on the following key dimensions for a framework exploring new sub-national spaces of governance.

First, the need for adopting a genuine multi-scalar approach in analysing urban and regional governance in general, we cannot speak of some unproblematic transition from one scale based form of regulation to another but rather need to conceive a more complex picture where a whole series of movements occur between differing strategies and structures. The significance of the emergent new regionalist map of the world can only be understood in relation to processes of change in the nature of local governance. The sub-regional-dynamics that unfolded over the politics of regeneration examined here suggest how this itself leads to conflicts over the orientation and ownership of policy.

Second, the research highlights the value of focusing on the politically charged processes involved in the production of scales such as the city and the region.

In the politics 'of' scale in fact struggles are not about scale per se but institutionalised practices and processes (endowed with an important scalar dimension). The focal points are the political endeavours that come to implicate scale in some important ways. Furthermore, any erstwhile scalar architecture is only constitutive and reflective of the political practices and strategies of political agents and their spaces of dependence (Cox. 1998).



Only a commitment to explore these struggles over the rescaling of governance can assist in revealing the particular social, political, ideological and economic forces that appear to be constituting specific scales such as the 'region' and the 'city-region' as the hegemonic scalar fixes of contemporary capitalism. This is crucial also in order to seriously explore the role of ideology as a key causal factor in relation to governance restructuring. This research emphasised, for example, the role of a discourse that tended to emphasise the role of weaknesses endogenous to the partnership environment to explain the economic problems of sub-regional areas at the expenses of more structural problems. This discourse favoured and was supported by the RDA as this sought to forge new sub-regional arrangements more favourable to the delivery of its own agenda.

Finally, the endeavour of this study to accommodate contingent forms of agency and politics could emphasise the potential openness of state structures to more inclusive agendas. This requires the formation of distinct coalitions or "regional armatures" (Lipietz 1994) that can develop alternative sub-state projects in order to gain access to capacity and resources in the face of competition from groups advancing less progressive agendas. The political and economic significance of *some* territories and the temporary ability of their leaders to exploit this as a means of scale jumping is certainly worth of greater attention. It is also worth bearing that this is unlikely to be under conditions of their own choosing.

#### 4.2 'Concrete' Rescaling Research and Single Region Case Studies

Chapters 2 and 3 noted that recent theoretical advancements on the production of new regional spaces tended to proceed largely in isolation from methodological reflection; this, it was argued, had critical theoretical implications and undermined the capacity of these contributions to fully address the failings of traditional new regionalist research. An effective route for bridging this gap between theoretical advancement and methodological reflection involves the reconsideration of the

critical realism paradigm in connection with the methodological position of intensive case-study research.

Only recently Brenner (2009) has finally come to acknowledge the missing link in terms of systematic methodological reflexivity that characterises much rescaling research arguing for a clearer distinction between the different levels of abstraction on which such research is organised. Thinking about the region in terms of its place along this 'dialectal spiral' (from the abstract to the concrete) can assist in highlighting its importance as an 'in between space', as well as underlining the continued relevance of regional research as a key domain for combining knowledge of the economic and the political in the study of new state space. Single region intensive case study research proved to be a valid research tool for investigating the way in which various policy frameworks, with their different scalar dimensions, combine or come into conflict in or around the region. These multi-scalar and multi-dimensional connections cannot be understood through 'chaotic conception'. Intensive case study research allows us to preserve the uniqueness of the region while, through 'rational abstraction', allowing us to establish the necessary connections to other scales. The message from this thesis therefore should not be read simply as a defence of regional research, a call for more single region case studies. Rather, it stands an argument for this type of multi-scalar and multi-dimensional approach to an empirically rich yet theoretically grounded regional research that is capable of substantially contributing to shape the agenda of rescaling research.

## **5. Limitations and Future Research Agendas**

While it is felt that this research account has something to offer in terms of empirical, theoretical and methodological debates, various avenues remained unexplored, and others were not explored in as great detail as may have been the intention at the outset.

This section identifies some of these limitations of the research; furthermore it also indicates avenues for future research in order to extend the scope of this project as well as to build on and further develop its implications.

### 5.1 Limitations

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the data collection method adopted can be subject to criticism. At the outset, my intention was to disaggregate the state further, considering its embodiment in the individual brokers, officials and politicians in a way that responded more closely to calls within the SRA to acknowledge and account for the interpenetration of the state with the private status and spaces of actors (Jeffrey, 2000).

The extent to which I could proceed along this avenue was limited by the degree and form of access granted that re-shaped the research agenda somewhat. In particular, it was initially hoped that interviews and documentary evidence would be supplemented with a period of embedded observation of one or more governance organisation in the region. This would have allowed for 'submerged' analysis to bring out the deeper levels of decision-making and organisational cultures providing an opportunity for gaining access to the "intimacy" (Jeffrey, p.1033) of governance institutions. Unfortunately I was unable to persuade actors and institutions to grant me this form of access. The circumstances in the field thus compromised the level of saturation within the individual experiences and everyday practices that give the state its concrete form.

This would have acted as 'added bonus' to the material that I was able to generate in other ways, but was certainly not critical to uncovering the issues under consideration. More likely it would have led to a different type of account, answering slightly different sets of questions.

Another limitation of the research relates to its temporal dimension, this emerges in two respects. The demise of the RDA regions in 2010 by a newly elected coalition Government imposed a level of reflection with regard to the continuing

validity of this thesis. It is worth reiterating that the knowledge generated has important implications beyond the space-time dimensions that define the case study in this thesis. However, some problems were caused by the level of vagueness that characterized unfolding governance trajectories in the research period. This meant not only that often respondents found it difficult to respond to simple questions when these involved an engagement with future scenarios, but also that the question of setting a temporal limit for the research became problematic in relation to the risk of truncating the trajectory of evolving events. In order to avoid reliance on data undermined by significant omissions, during the fieldwork I was often forced to re-adapt the research strategy in order to respond to unexpected directions and emerging insights. Also, I often filled the gaps emerging in the interview data in relation to the more proximate events by making use of documentary evidence that became available successively. In relation in particular to the events around the city-region initiatives, the fact that the research was conducted at a time of significant institutional and political upheaval might have conditioned the nature of the responses and the extent to which the research account is inward looking. Chapter 5 noted how the circumstances of this policy void might have contributed to the sensitivity of the research towards the tensions underlying the governance transition under study, but this means also that perhaps issues around which tensions were less developed or absent might have been underplayed in the research account.

The theoretical perspective chosen reflected principally my desire to hold on to the strengths of traditional political economy perspectives on state space (in relation to key concerns with capital accumulation and uneven development) while aiming at being somewhat more inductive in approach so as to allow for a serious consideration of the question of sub-national governance of economic development as a political issue. The latter goal in particular pointed to other possible routes, in particular: abandoning the political economy approach altogether, or aiming for a more complete integration between this and post-structuralist theoretical stances.

The way the political-economy and relational, topological perspectives on space can be seen as coming to share similar concerns indicates the value of the route chosen in this study and that places emphasis on the possibility of a more inductive or 'flexible' political-economy of scale framework. I recognise that this study remains vulnerable to criticism from other perspectives. As argued in Chapter 2, my argument however is that an enriched understanding of new state spaces not only serves to address the lacuna of the new regionalism but defines a profitable domain through which to push forward the terms of the debate between competing theoretical stances.

### 5.2 Directions for Future Research

Building on the approach and findings in this thesis other clear avenues for future research emerge. Alongside the political transition that saw a Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition replacing Labour in Government in May 2010, the political and economic landscape of the UK is being shaken up by the effects of what is perhaps the most severe global economic crisis of the contemporary era. The majority of capital-centric accounts and analyses of the financial crisis emerging in geography have to date concentrated largely on mapping, delineating and analysing financial practices and capital flows through which the economic crisis unfolded (Harvey, 2010; Peck, 2010). While this is, of course, necessary and important, it should not conceal broader questions related to the different and contested ways in which the crisis is politicised with their important theoretical and political implications. These concerns related to the 'decentralisation' of the crisis emphasise the urgency of considering the way political geographies are being re-configured in connection with the crisis.

Following the abolition of New Labour's regional infrastructure (RDAs, the Regional Government Offices and Regional Spatial Planning), the UK coalition government has acknowledged that the impact of the path it has chosen to exit the economic crisis would be more severe in the former industrial regions of the North. New voluntary local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), bringing together groups of

councils and business leaders geared around supposed 'functional economic areas' and a Regional Growth Fund are the identified solution. But the details of this solution still remain unclear, emerging along the way in connection with the development of other policies. For example, doubts remain with respect to the relationship between LEPs and bids for new Enterprise Zones or city-region mayors. Critical debate around the failings of past urban and regional policies needs to be kept alive around emergent measures. There is the urgent need for research that contributes to grounding the current policy-oriented discussions in a wider conceptual context. Only in this way the question of the extent to which the mistakes of the past are being addressed or re-produced can be addressed. There is the need thus to extend the case study developed in this thesis tracing further the evolving scalar configuration of region.

A wider agenda concerned with uncovering how the remaking of political geographies in connection with the economic crisis could be developed also from more comparative research beyond the single case study. There is a case for considering how the patterns of state rescaling taking shape in the UK differ from those in other European (and non European) states unravelling discontinuities and path dependencies associated with different national institutional trajectories and policies repertoires.

## **6. Final Reflections: A 'Fresh Start' for Urban and Regional Policy and Research?**

The fact that, as indicated in Chapter 8, the narratives of global competitiveness and knowledge (city-) regions fit uneasily with the economic realities in the areas that were the object of attention in this thesis (and other lagging regions across Europe), serves to highlight more than simply the blindness of local and regional administrators in these areas. It captures the extent of the challenges for local and regional economies facing a limited availability of policy options in a political-economic system oriented towards global competitiveness. Some of the problems

of such areas have distinct economic roots; in this respect, the type of supply-side interventions favoured, for example, through the RDAs configured as an apt response. But others however have roots that are more clearly political. They refer to the socio-spatial contradictions of a model built around the imperative of sustained growth supported by the discourse that 'everyone can be a winner' (Bristow, 2005) and state policies' efforts at 'flanking' within this model. To sustain growth and compete on the global stage nations, regions and city-regions are required to innovate and apply technology and cultivate a portfolio of increasingly intangible assets. This, in turn, requires economies with significant capacity to create, retain and employ knowledge. There is now substantial evidence to argue that the type of policy interventions in the regions that were favoured by the New Labour Government were unable to do this in a sustainable manner. As the current economic crisis unfolds also as in the form of a crisis of 'hard economics', some of those lines of critique elaborated in the field of critical regional and urban studies might finally begin to move from the margins towards the centre of the mainstream political debate in the UK and elsewhere. But these exceptional circumstances are also revealing the limitations of a large part of critical writings on the regressive politics of urban and regional change with respect to the capacity to delineate alternative scenarios. In including this study in this category I recognise the urgency for a future research agenda that considers more directly substantial questions related to the implications of the current scenario for: the future of those economies without the prospect of a growing stock of good jobs and the delineation of geographies of exclusion; and the 'lived experiences' of the different socio-spatial communities and individuals within the 'knowledge city-region'. City-regional theory perhaps does offer some opportunities to rethink relations of production and distribution and from this to conceive new progressive political coalitions and social movements. These policy interventions and movements presumably will have to be considerably different from those of the 60s and 70s, but, as a function of the way in which capitalism has developed spatially around major urban and regional agglomerations, there is increasingly likely to be something city-regional about these forces; quite simply it is where

many, perhaps the majority of people in the developed and also parts of the developing world work and live.



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## Annex 1: Research Participants

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**Table 2: Respondents by Job Title**

	<b>Total</b>
<b>Regional Policy Director</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Regional Policy Manager</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Regional Policy Officer</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Regional Stakeholder</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Sub-regional Policy Executive</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Sub-regional Policy Manager</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Sub-regional Stakeholder</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Local Authority Executive</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Local Authority Manager</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Local Authority Officer</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Local Authority Councillor</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Local Authority Leader</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Local Stakeholder</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

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**Table 3: Respondents by Organisation**

	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yorkshire Forward</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Government Office</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Regional Assembly</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Stakeholder Organisation</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>SRP Unit</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Sub-Regional LSC</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

### Interview with RDA

- Background – Can you explain me what your role is in the organisation and your involvement with sub-regional investment planning?
- Can you describe be the functioning of investment planning?
- What problems have emerged in the functioning of the investment planning?
- What are the causes of these problems?
- Around which issues around generally discussions with local partners become more problematic? How have these been solved?
- How does investment planning changes from one area to the other? (i.e. SY and the Humber). Why?
- How have priorities for the development of the region changed through time?
- Can you tell me about the relation of the RDA with the VCS in investment planning?
- What impact have these changes had on regional/sub-regional partnership working?
- How has the emergence of city-regional agenda impacted on regional/sub-regional partnership working?

### **Interview with Local Authority**

- Background – Can you tell me a little bit about your role?
- What was the impact of the entrance of the RDA on regional local authorities and how these went on conducting local regeneration?
- How has the role of the RDA as a partner changed through time through investment planning?
- What are the problems of investment planning?
- What are the causes of these problems?
- Around which issues generally discussions with the RDA become more problematic? How such tensions are generally resolved?
- What is the role of local MPs?
- What is the impact of the city-region on sub-regional partnership working?
- How the priorities in the sub-region have changed since the emergence of city-regional agendas?

### **Interview with VCS**

- Background – Can you tell me a little bit about your organisation? When did your involvement in the SRP and sub-regional investment planning started and how?
- Can you tell me about the relation between the RDA and the Sector in the sub-region in the context of investment planning?

- What problems have emerged for the sector in investment planning? How have tensions been solved?
- What impact has the Single Pot regime had on CED priorities?
- What impact have the new city-regional agendas had on your involvement in the sub-regional partnerships?



## Annex 3: Meetings and Events Attended

### **Meetings:**

South Yorkshire Partnership Board Meeting, May, 2007

Sheffield City Region Forum Board Meeting, July 2007

### **Consultations and Workshops:**

'City Region Knowledge Strategy' workshop, Sheffield City Region, October, 2007;

Hull and Humber Port City Region Development Programme consultation event, June, 2006.

Hull and Humber Port City Region Development Programme workshop, April, 2006.