

Regional governance – back to the future?

*Re-mixing the economy of welfare:
what is emerging beyond the market and the state?*
University of the West of Scotland, 2nd February 2009

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Acknowledgements

-  Economic and Social Research Council
-  Research Councils UK
-  Seminar series organisers



Outline

- A decade of devolution: a retrospective
- The lack of clarity in English devolution
- 'A muddle of fixes and bodes'
- Many strategies, zero longevity
- The levers and hooks of 'real' English governance
- Opportunities for the voluntary and community sector in sub-national engagement



Devolution in the UK

- Enduring dilemma of UK state
 - Colonial superpower with local residuals
- 19th century debates around devolution
 - "Home rule for all"
- Centralised state losing legitimacy under de-industrialisation
 - Rise of Celtic nationalist movements
- 1979 legislation fell after Scots 'yes', Wales 'no'



UK Devolution post-1997

- ▀ Since 1960s, huge amount of administrative devolution to S, W, NI
 - ▀ Plus creation of regional development agencies
- ▀ By 1997, ready for political oversight of 'territorial machinery'
 - ▀ Subject to local political acceptance
- ▀ The issue of the West Lothian question
 - ▀ England: no administrative tradition?



The English fudge

- ▀ The 'Alternative Regional Strategy' community
 - ▀ 1980s monetarist crisis – devolution solution
- ▀ 1994: creation of Government Offices
 - ▀ Prefecture but administrative kernel
- ▀ 1996 Regional Policy Commission
 - ▀ RDAs & RSAs as first step on devolution road
- ▀ 1997 Manifesto
 - ▀ The first in a series of disappointments



Post-1997 arrangement

- ▀ Multi-stage process
 - ▀ Regional Development Agencies (1999)
 - ▀ Scrutinised by Regional Chambers (2000)
 - ▀ *RDAs as Strategic Drivers (2000)*
 - ▀ The Single Programme Budget (2002)
 - ▀ Regional spending review submissions (2004)
- ▀ RDA boards with some voluntary and community sector involvement (from 0-2)
- ▀ Stakeholders chambers also involved



Progress towards ERAs

- ▀ *Your region, your choice (2002)*
 - “elected assemblies – working with their key partners in other government organisations, business, and voluntary and community groups – will be in a position to drive the implementation of their strategies.”
- ▀ Fault lines echo Whitehall attitudes to devolution
- ▀ Only chance for success was Welsh-style mobilisation
- ▀ Lack of broad regional coalitions supportive of idea



The North East 'no' vote

- ▀ Proposals highly unpopular
 - ▀ Attempt to 'bounce' follower regions into 'Yes'
- ▀ 4th November 2004 – no vote
 - ▀ 78% opposition to idea – damning mandate
- ▀ End to idea of ERAs for seven year period
 - ▀ Re-emergence of West Lothian question
- ▀ 24 forgettable months
 - ▀ Science cities, New localism, city-regions, Manchester.



The Sub-National Review

- ▀ 'No' vote stalls progress at regional level
 - ▀ Re-opens difficult questions already finessed
- ▀ Recognition of need to revitalise the regions
 - ▀ Tied in with sub-national reforms
- ▀ The Sub-National Review – smoke & mirrors?
 - ▀ Regional ministers
 - ▀ Regional leadership boards
 - ▀ Regional select committees
- ▀ Clear accountability, limited influence??



Influencing regional development

- ▀ Deficits of knowledge & legitimacy regionally
 - ▀ Mobilised voluntary and community sector can emerge as salient stakeholder
- ▀ Effective strategy development requires strong input from social partners
 - ▀ Opportunities for sensible 3rd sector voices
- ▀ Knowledge about delivery important in designing effective strategies
 - ▀ Too many strategies remain purely aspirational

A convoluted system demands convoluted engagement!

- ▀ Defining system characteristic is ...
 - ▀ ... a lack of systematic nature!
- ▀ Rapid turnover at all level
 - ▀ Concepts, strategies, structures
- ▀ Some formal structures for voluntary and community sector engagement
 - ▀ Difficult to establish a sensible role
- ▀ High costs of 'engagement' ...
 - ▀ ... for relatively limited impacts/ outcomes

The wicked issues of regional engagement (I)

- Being forced to conform to roles defined by others (statutory partners)
 - voluntary and community sector very diverse
 - Inclusion/ exclusion
 - Representation vs. expertise/ experience
- Limited experience of consultation/ listening
 - Haphazard, unproductive activity
 - Little continuity of involvement
 - Continual disappointment/ discouragement



The wicked issues of regional engagement (II)

- 'New thinking' vs. established experience
 - Easy to dismiss existing partners' views
 - Maintaining the novelty of the opinions
 - Not being easily enrolled into others projects
- Fragmentations within the sector
 - Selection of convenient interlocutors
 - Divergence of needs within sector
 - Reality of divide-and-rule funding



Conclusion

- ▀ Little hope English devolution resolved soon
 - ▀ English Parliament offers little respite
- ▀ Single regional strategy offers much to VCS
 - ▀ But within tightly-defined external roles
- ▀ Narrowing of public realm → functional?
 - ▀ 3rd sector re-animating public political debates
- ▀ 3rd sector must retain its core characteristics
 - ▀ And force regional bodies to value them!