

REGIONS AND REGIONAL UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT FOREVER?  
SOME REFLECTIVE COMMENTS UPON THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, for a variety of reasons, there has been a resurgence of interest in 'the region' from a variety of both intellectual and practical perspectives, with the somewhat surprising result that regional studies have

come to be of central concern and the region has come to occupy a central place in social scientific discourse and political debates. In this, questions of power loom large. In this paper I examine four, to a degree inter-weaving, sets of key questions, framed by a concern with who has the power of decision, in both intellectual debates about regions and regional policy and practice. First, how is the region to be defined? Secondly, how can the concept of governmentality deepen our understanding of regions? Thirdly, how are 'the region's interests' to be defined? And finally, how is regional economic development to be defined? Problematizing what we mean by the terms 'region' and 'development' in these ways and posing and exploring questions such as these will allow the study of regions to be taken forward in a progressive manner in the future.

## Introduction

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in 'the region' from a variety of both intellectual and practical perspectives, with the result that regional studies are once again of central concern. This re-emergence to centre stage has reflected a number of developments. On the one hand, from being consigned for many years to the murky margins of the history of geographical thought, somewhat surprisingly the region has come to occupy a central place in both social scientific discourse and political debates. At the same time as it has experienced a revived status in geography, the

significance of the region – and, more generally of the spatial constitution of economies and societies – came to be recognised as a critical issue in much of the social sciences: for example, in the core disciplines of economics (KRUGMAN, 2000), politics (KEATING et al, 2003) and sociology (URRY, 1985) as well as in more applied areas of the social sciences such as business studies (for example, PORTER, 2003; SNOWDON and STONEHOUSE, 2006). Related to this, in the context of policy and practice, the region has become seen as a – even *the* – key territorial unit in an era of (neo)liberal globalisation, the “imagined unit of competition” (LOVERING, 1998, 392), linked to a variety of measures to devolve responsibility for regional socio-economic development and well-being to the regional level.

Not surprisingly, however, views have often differed quite sharply as to how best to think about the region and about the merits of a regional approach to issues of governance and economic development, both between and among politicians, citizens and intellectuals of various allegiances. For example, in June 2006 the citizens of Catalonia voted for a significant extension of powers to the regional (or as many of them would see it, Catalan national) scale in a further step in the evolution of asymmetric federalism in Spain. This in turn provoked a spate of similar demands in several other Spanish regions (Andalusia, the Balearic Islands, Galicia, and Valencia – the Basque country already had greater autonomy than Catalonia) which feared that they would lose out as a result of greater autonomy in Catalonia. At the same time, the Catalan vote generated fears from other, smaller regions, with weaker claims to historic nationhood (such as Castile and Aragon), that they would lose out

as the map of uneven socio-economic development within Spain became more sharply etched. In contrast, some eighteen months earlier in November 2004 in north east England, a region with a long history of a certain sort of regionalist movement (see HUDSON, 2006a), though one grounded more in an economic definition of the region, especially in terms of state economic management, rather than a regional political identity per se, the population decisively rejected proposals for an elected Regional Assembly and an enhanced degree of devolution to the region. However, those voting against were something of an unholy alliance – some voted against because of opposition to greater devolution per se, others because they favoured devolution but felt that what was on offer was a weak and problematic set of proposals that would be inadequate to begin effectively to tackle the developmental problems of the region. Furthermore, there were genuine fears that the proposed Assembly would simply offer central government an excuse to lay the blame for the region's continuing problems on people in the region, a classic example of 'blaming the victim'. Which viewpoint was correct, both in north east England and the various Spanish regions (if indeed one can talk in those terms on such an issue), is not the point. The point is that 'the region' had again become central to political debate, both as an object of state policy and as a putative subject shaping and implementing state policy but with sharply divergent views as to both the efficacy and indeed propriety of the region as both subject and object of policy. At the same time, however, there has been a (not so?) subtle change in language and the linguistic representation of the region: formerly "lagging" regions are re-cast as "under-performing" or "challenged" (BOSANQUET et al, 2006), while the emphasis

has switched from addressing “social need” to re-dressing “economic under-performance”.

Similar divergences of view points and differences in emphasis are to be found amongst academics interested in regional issues and uneven development. In part, these can be related to exploration of a range of evolutionary and institutional perspectives on regions and regional development that have allowed more nuanced interpretations of the constitution of regions and regional development trajectories (for example, see AMIN, 1999; HUDSON, 2005; MARTIN and SUNLEY, 2006). In this, a variety of scholars have built upon the insights provided by Marxian political economy – in particular an understanding of the way in which regional uneven development is structurally and necessarily inscribed within capitalist development (HARVEY, 1982) so that capital constantly “see-saws” between regions in search of enhanced profits (SMITH, 1984) - to provide more subtle elaborations of the relationship between the trajectories of individual regions and the broader map of regional uneven development and the processes through which the specificities of particular regions are constructed – an issue on which MASSEY’s (1984) work was seminal.

However, unsurprisingly, opening up this conceptual space has produced a variety of – sometimes competing - views rather than a consensus on one. For some, regions have become the key territorial units in an era of globalisation (for example, see SCOTT, 1998; STORPER, 1995), although, arguably, the focus on the region is being replaced by a revived interest in

city-regions as the pivotal territorial unit (see SCOTT and STORPER, 2003; OECD, 2006). In either case, however, the emphasis is placed firmly upon endogenous growth processes, regional institutions and regionally-specific knowledges and learning – in short, on what has been termed the Territorial Innovations Models perspective on regional development (MOULAERT and SEKIA, 2003). Often, however, such claims are seen to be based upon empirically insubstantial evidence (MARKUSEN, 1999). In contrast, others would dispute this alleged primacy of the region and, on theoretical as well as empirical grounds, insist that the national remains the key scale (for example, see PIKE and TOMANEY, 2004) and that the significance of the regions as a pivotal site of capital accumulation, economic growth and governance has been over-emphasised, as has been the significance of knowledge and learning (for example, see HUDSON, 1999). The issue is not that the region is – or has suddenly become – unimportant but rather that any prioritising of the region as *the* pivotal spatial scale and territorial unit should be based upon careful and theoretically grounded empirical research rather than sweeping arm waving assertion based upon thin empirics (although as I have argued elsewhere, it is important to recognise the varying qualitative as well as quantitative forms that valid evidence can take: see HUDSON, 2003). Certainly there are instances of regions that can be seen as economically very successful – at least for some of their residents - as, for example, the case of Spain reveals but this is a far cry from the assertion that because some regions are successful, all can be successful in a ‘win-win’ world of bottom-up endogenous regional growth.

Associated with these differing views as to the centrality of the region to processes of economic growth and governance, there has been, again not surprisingly, some quite heated intellectual debate as to the most appropriate way to conceptualise regions and about the status of regions, both conceptually and politically. Often this has become polarised around competing either/or choices and two of these are of particular relevance. First, there are views of regions as closed, bounded and homogeneous entities that contrast with those of regions as open, permeable, and heterogeneous. Secondly, there are concepts of regions as objects of policy versus those of regions as subjects that influence, make and implement policy. However, to see these only as either/or choices is counter-productive and would lead the study of regions and their development into a number of spacious, but ultimately unproductive, cul-de-sacs. Rather than take an either/or perspective on these dichotomies, therefore, I argue that these must be seen from a both/and perspective, and that, crucially, which of these perspectives is chosen or given most weight depends – or at least should depend – upon the theoretical, political and practical contexts in which these choices are made. As such, they also depend upon issues of power and, more specifically, who has the power of decision in a number of key contexts.

The concept of power is a tricky one, with a range of views as to how best to think about power. As I have recently discussed these issues elsewhere (for example, see HUDSON, 2006b) I will not repeat that discussion here, other than to say that, drawing on the work of ALLEN (2003, 2004), three concepts of power can be identified. These varying conceptions stress different aspects

of power and the processes through which it is constituted and produced so that different conceptions allow an illumination of different aspects of power and their relevance to regional issues. The first conception, drawing on critical realism, is a 'centred' one of power as an inscribed capacity of individuals or institutions, which possess power by virtue of their constitutive social relationships and which they can exercise as 'power over' others. The second conception of power is a 'networked' conception. Power is conceived as a resource for achieving diverse ends, emphasising 'power to' and the ways in which power is generated to achieve desired outcomes rather than how power constrains action. The third conception of power is Foucauldian and diagrammatic. Power is conceived as a technology - a series of strategies, techniques and practices - that works on subjects. It is exercised through groups or organisations rather than being held or possessed by them or centred in them. Power is conceptualised as fluid and relational, exercised from innumerable points within civil society, the economy and the state – thus many agencies and institutions are involved within productive networks of power rather than power being seen as resting only in the state and its agencies.

While recognising the value of these different conceptions of power, ALLEN (2003) nonetheless sees them as inadequate and flawed in various ways. In particular, he argues that power is not a 'thing' but rather must be understood as a relational effect of social interaction inseparable from its effects, expressed via diverse and specific modalities of power, each with its own particularities and specificities, constituted differently in time and space. He



identifies six modalities of power: domination; authority; seduction; coercion; manipulation; and inducement. However, these are analytic distinctions so that in practice they are combined in practical strategies and actions. In short, ALLEN regards existing conceptions of power as requiring refinement, particularly in terms of recognising distinctive modalities of power and their implications from the exercise of power over space and through time, not least – as illustrated by his analyses of places such as the City of London and Potsdammer Platz in Berlin – in relation to the (re)production of regions. Equally, however, it is important to remember the sites – and structural relations – from which and through which these different modalities of power emanate and are exercised.

In the remainder of this paper I examine four, to a degree inter-weaving, sets of key questions in the context of a concern with who has the power of decision, in both intellectual debates and regional policy and practice. First, how is the region to be defined? Secondly, how can the concept of governmentality deepen our understanding of regions? Thirdly, how are ‘the region’s interests’ to be defined? And finally, how is regional economic development to be defined? Problematising what we mean by the terms ‘region’ and ‘development’ in these ways and posing and exploring questions such as these will allow the study of regions to be taken forward in a progressive manner in the future.

Subject or object of policy: how and by whom is the region to be defined?

Broadly speaking, in policy discourses and academic commentaries upon and interpretations of these, regions have been seen as either the object or the subject of state policies, and sometimes as both simultaneously. Although until recently the academic literature tended to focus upon regions as objects rather than subjects of policy, in fact there is a long history of the practical construction of regions as subjects as well as objects of policy (for example, see HUDSON, 2006a).

Typically, the construction of the region as an object of (national) state policy relies upon two processes. First, the demarcation of regional boundaries – the metaphorical drawing of lines on the ground that mark out the space of the region and/or the construction of material markers to denote, literally ‘on the ground’, where one region ends and another begins. Regions in this sense are literally “marked out” (cf. THRIFT, 2002). Secondly, the specification of a series of statistical indicators that allows the socio-economic profile of the region to be defined. Equally, these indicators allow changes in this profile, in the region’s development and in the extent to which it is defined as ‘problematic’ – as defined by these measures – to be assessed. As these are essentially central state policies *for* regions, such decisions about the drawing of boundaries, the definition of criteria against which regions are defined as problematic or not, and the monitoring of the state of regions against these criteria are taken (no doubt typically with some perfunctory consultation with relevant social actors in the regions) by central state ministries and agencies. In them rests the authority to assume this power of decision. While these may have administrative offices in the regions (as for example, with the post-1994

Government Offices of the Regions in England), the key decisions are typically taken by national government ministers and/or bureaucrats and civil servants in national capitals, located at varying distances from the regions affected by them and clearly distant from the peripheral regions that have the most serious developmental problems. Put in slightly different terms, this involves remote centres of calculation that monitor, discipline and govern regions 'at a distance' (LATOURE, 1987) and on that basis reach decisions about policy measures and as to the resources and developmental aid that is to be allocated to different regions (issues discussed more fully in the following section).

In part in response to this resurgence of political and popular interest in regions, there has, in recent years, undoubtedly been a growing emphasis in the social science literature on regional devolution as one part of more general processes of state "re-organisation" in many parts of the capitalist world (JESSOP, 1997). Pressures for greater regional devolution 'from below' have been generated by regionalist and nationalist movements, seeking to create more powerful sub-national spaces of governance and regulation within the boundaries of national states or – indeed – to create new national spaces. This can involve challenges from within regions to the authority of central government and to existing regional boundaries, and/or challenges over the criteria used to define regions, and/or challenges as to the existing order in terms of who has the power to decide matters of regional interest and concern. However, while there may have been 'bottom up' pressures from within regions, in part a consequence of the powers of seduction and the

promise of greater regional autonomy, national states have not been innocent and passive by-standers in these processes of territorial decentralisation of power and/or responsibilities. For example, states may seek to preserve the integrity of their national territory via granting increased autonomy to regions within their boundaries or seek to contain fiscal crises by devolving responsibility (but not commensurate resources) for economic development to regions. While there may well be political and social forces within regions arguing for greater devolution to them, it is important to acknowledge that regional devolution can have negative as well as positive economic effects. Decentralisation can impose economic costs in the form of efficiency disadvantages, equity-related drawbacks and institutional burdens. Furthermore, many of the disadvantageous effects are contingent upon which actors are driving devolutionary policies and, as a result, the specific form that devolution takes. (RODRIGUES-POSE and GILL, 2005).

These varied pressures for devolution have certainly reinforced or even, in some cases, initiated tendencies to shift regulatory practices from the national level and so qualitatively change relationships between national and regional levels. It is, however, important not to overstate the extent of such changes. There is a long-established sub-national territorial structure to state power in many capitalist states in response to requirements for administrative efficiency and political legitimacy, to say nothing of smooth accumulation. There are clear examples demonstrating that the power to shape policies for regions has been shifted more to the regional level – as in Spain – with greater decentralisation, to some regions at least, of the power to decide and of the resources to implement

decisions. Rather than regions simply administering central government policies, regions construct and implement their own policies. This is intended to produce a greater correspondence between administrative spaces and the meaningful spaces of the regional life world, albeit with regional boundaries determined in the last analysis by central states. As a result, more complex architectures of political power and spaces of governing have emerged. However, again, it is important not to overstate the extent to which the “power to decide” and commensurate resources have been devolved to regions as opposed to the regional scale remaining one of importance for the administration of national policies *for* the regions. It is worth emphasising that regional devolution involves relative shifts in responsibility and power of decision and that these are heavily circumscribed precisely because national states retain their authority and the power to make decisions as the extent and form of devolution.

As well as such scalar shifts, there has also often been a re-definition of the boundaries of state activities associated with a change in emphasis from government to governance in systems of governing. Regulatory capacities have been shifted “outwards” to non-state or ‘quasi-state’ organisations with enhanced significance placed upon social practices beyond the state. A range of organisations and institutions within civil society has been incorporated into processes of governance. This has been particularly associated with the promotion of network concepts and networked forms of regional governance (HADJIMICHALIS and HUDSON, 2006). The growing emphasis on governance is recognition of the increasing importance - or perhaps more accurately is increasing recognition of the importance - of the institutions of civil society in

securing the conditions under which the (regional) economy is possible. The growing emphasis upon regionally networked forms of governance is grounded in a (typically tacit) assumption that networked forms of power at the regional scale are adequate to deal with the structural power of capital and to resolve regional development issues.

In summary, then, the key issue is not so much the rise of the region and the decline of the national state but rather the new forms of relationships between national and regional. Integral to the reorganisation of the national state is the emergence of new, more complicated structures of governing, involving re-defined relations between economy, society and state and complex links within multi-scalar systems of governing. As LOVERING (1998, 392) acerbically notes, however, “the apparent resurgence of the region makes less sense as a phoenix-like re-emergence of regional economic crucibles than as the effect of top-down policies to replace the ‘imagined community’ at the national level with an ‘imagined unit of competition’ at the regional level”. However, despite the emergence of such new imaginaries, in practice national states are not eclipsed by resurgent regions and retain a key role as “scale managers”, shaping decisions about scalar shifts in regulatory capacity, serving as authoritative centres of both calculation and persuasion, performing as authors of narratives about change and reform and as centres of interpretation and dissemination of knowledge about experiences elsewhere (PECK, 2003, 357). The critical issue is not the demise but the character of the national state, the dominant modalities through which it continues to exercise power, the type of regulatory régime that it maintains, the geometry of that régime and the extent to which it involves

devolution to the regional scale, and the form of capitalist economy that it seeks to encourage.

### Regions and governmentality

The Foucauldian concept of governmentality (for example, see FOUCAULT, 1991; DEAN, 1999) further illuminates the processes of reorganising the state and attempts to create the region as a political subject and the regional as a new – or perhaps more accurately re-defined - scale of governing. While the emphasis on the national as the dominant space and spatial scale of regulation can be seen as expressive of one governmentality and ensemble of varying modalities of power, the shift to concepts of multi-level governance and of re-defined boundaries between economy, civil society and state in the processes of governing can be seen as both indicative and constitutive of an alternative governmentality and combination of modalities. Not least, the spatial object of policy and the spaces of governing are seen to encompass more than just the national. Acknowledging this, however – as exemplified by the cases of Spain and the UK described in the introductory section – the shift towards regions as modes and scales of governing remains contested, partial and uneven in its development.

By conjoining ‘government’ and ‘mentality’ in a productive alliance, governmentality therefore emphasises the practical ‘how’ of governing and the structures of government and governing, the way in which the thought involved in the practices of government is collective and relatively taken-for-

granted, usually not open to questioning by its practitioners<sup>i</sup>. The existing order becomes naturalised and as such is not open for discussion. More specifically, in the context of state policies and the governing of regions “at a distance”, governmentality “is intrinsically linked to the activities of expertise” (MACKINNON, 2000, 296) and the authority that this provides. The purpose of deploying expertise is to enact “assorted attempts at the calculated administration of diverse aspects of conduct through the countless, often competing, local tactics of education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement” rather than to seek to weave “an all-pervasive web of ‘social control’”. Moreover, space is an important element of governmentality, precisely because such governmental activities are territorially-demarcated. For in order to “to govern it is necessary to render visible the space over which government is to be exercised. And this is not simply a matter of looking: space has to be re-presented, marked out” (THRIFT, 2002, 205), emphasising that regions need to be defined, represented and their boundaries (literally or metaphorically) marked out, as both objects and subjects of governing.

This focuses attention upon those with the power to define and represent in these ways. Rather than unquestioningly accept the claims of those who assert their right to speak for the region, the spotlight is turned on their activities, the modalities of power that they deploy in pursuit of this right – manipulation and coercion as much as, if not more than, authority and domination – and the basis on which they claim the right to act in this way problematises. In short, the black box of the region is opened up in order to



explain how it can perform as a political subject with shared regional interests via uncovering the bases of the formation of a dominant or hegemonic regional bloc. The creation of such a cohesive regional bloc is a result of the successful realisation of specific regional projects that unite diverse social actors, with otherwise differing or competing interests, around a distinct line of action that becomes defined as the regional interest. However, achieving such unity is always a contingent matter. As such, unity is always provisional. Even if unity is achieved and maintained for a time, however, there is no guarantee that such projects will always and only have their intended effects precisely because of the inability to anticipate the emergent properties of practices.

The concept of governmentality has several further significant consequences relating to issues of regions, regional policies and regional devolution. The first relates to the constitution of the objects, subjects and spaces of government. For example, regional economies are constituted via regional statistics, which have a key role in 'making economies visible' and constituting them as objects for policy action. The capability to decide upon these defining statistical measures is clearly a critical issue. Secondly, LATOUR (1987, 237-40) emphasises the key role of "centres of calculation", critical nodes in which information on distant objects is brought together, compared, combined, and aggregated via use of mathematical and statistical techniques, thereby enabling government to "act at a distance" on objects, such as regions, through its programmes and policies. Put slightly differently, "through a process of mobilization, the truth claims of accredited authority figures, under the guise of neutrality and efficiency, set out the norms of conduct that enable

distant events and people to be governed at arms' length" (ALLEN, 2003, 141). Thirdly, it highlights "the specific mechanisms, procedures and tactics assembled and deployed as particular programmes are materialised" (MACKINNON, 2000, 295) and through which governmental programmes are activated and put into practice. Particular techniques and practices become governmental because they can be made practical, transformed into concrete devices for managing and directing reality. Inscription (for example, writing down agreed quantitative targets for regional economic growth) and calculation are key technologies, "responsibilising" and disciplining actors to the claims of central authority (ROSE, 1996). These technologies render reality – and in this particular context, regions - "stable, mobile, comparable, combinable", enabling government to act on it (ROSE, and MILLER, 1992, 185).

Such moves are not unproblematic, theoretically or practically, however. For example, there is a danger that a governmental perspective encourages a view of power as all-pervasive, found everywhere, expressed via a seemingly infinite variety of practices and techniques, such that any sense of hierarchy or structure in terms of the relative importance of different sources of power slips from view. Furthermore, there are tensions between decentralisation to regions and the development of new managerial technologies at national level to steer the activities of regional agencies and ensure that they deliver national policy objectives. Regional spaces become simultaneously objects and subjects of national government, and via "the combination of flexibility and standardisation (that is, different levels, same targets) ... gives

governmental technologies their utility as instruments for managing space” (MacKinnon, 2000, 309). However, there is no guarantee that targets will be attained (witness the continuing problematic status of many peripheral regions). Moreover, granting a degree of autonomy to enable regions to become political subjects also creates the possibility of forming enclosures, tightly bound sites of vigorously defended professional expertise that are resistant to the wishes of government (ROSE and MILLER, 1991). Thus an unintended consequence of empowering experts “in and for” regions may be to create the capacity to resist the intentions of central government towards those regions as objects of its policies. There may well be irreconcilable differences between “authority voices” (O’MALLEY, 2000), the ‘experts’ enrolled by national and regional organisations, respectively. Equally, it may create capacity, or at least the space in which such capacity might emerge and evolve, for the elaboration – although not necessarily the implementation - of alternative regional projects, indicative of the more general contradictory tendencies that plague state policies. However, such creative capacity may well be lacking or fail to emerge in the space created for it, especially in those regions that have a history of economic decline and selective out-migration of their most talented residents. As a result of this, and institutional sclerosis, there may well be a lack of research capacity to analyse and interpret developmental tendencies and design context-specific policies that best suit the situation of specific regions in the face of these broader forces, even when given the chance to do so (for example, see OECD, 2006). As a result, regions – or, more precisely, key actors in government departments and organisations and related development bodies drawn from the cast of ‘usual

suspects' - often fall back upon a limited set of consultants and "experts", who are seen as the sole repositories of authoritative and relevant knowledge, to produce strategies that see all regions, irrespective of their varied conditions and histories, as seeking to mimic "the global leaders" or to grow more rapidly than the national average while pursuing generically similar policies and practices

How are we to conceptualise the processes through which 'the region' and 'the region's interests' are constructed?

In the previous section, I emphasised that the construction of a region as a socio-material ensemble and of a 'regional interest' is always, necessarily, provisional, precisely because it is the product of a social process. Indeed, this process may well involve conflict and differing views and, as JESSOP (1990) emphasises, objects (and one might add, subjects) of regulation are not fully constituted prior to the struggles over their regularisation but are partially constituted through them. Essentialist conceptions of regions are no longer intellectually tenable. Regions are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered. They are socially constructed, both discursively and materially, in relation to specific criteria. However, it is important to acknowledge that political actors and particular interest groups may seek to define and defend regions in essentialist terms and it is important to understand why this is so, and this is relevant in relation to arguments about regions and regional development. Not least, the claim that regions can and should become active subjects rather than passive objects of policy often rests on assertions as to

some essential regional (or national) identity, often mobilised around some perceived injustice or inequality.

This recent re-thinking of the region is predicated upon a strongly relational approach. Regions are seen as constituted from spatialised social relations, stretched out over space and materialised in various forms, and also through representational narratives about them (for example, see AMIN, 2004). The spatiality of the dynamics of capitalism, the uneven geographies of its mechanisms of growth and decline and the stories told about them, represent one way of conceptualising the processes underlying the (re)construction of regions. Regions can be seen as products of complex condensations of social relationships, of varying density and variety, which combine contingently in specific time/space couplings to produce what are, in the last analysis, unique regions but regions with fuzzy and permeable boundaries. The simultaneous combined and uneven development of particular regions reflects a shifting engagement with mechanisms of growth and decline as these are stretched over space in the flux of real historical time (HARVEY, 1982).

This relational approach therefore provides a way of thinking that challenges the view of the region as a coherent bounded territorial entity and discloses a region which is by no means necessarily a whole, with the characteristics of coherence which that term implies; nor is it necessarily a bounded and closed entity. Thinking about a region in terms of stretched out social relationships reveals a complex and unbounded lattice of articulations constructed through and around relations of power and inequality. It is a discontinuous lattice,

punctured by structured exclusions, with intra-regional variation “because of the uneven nature of the overlay of different [defining] criteria” (ALLEN et al., 1998, 55-6). While the region becomes the nexus of a variety of social relationships and of modalities of power, the spatial reach of these relationships differs and therefore there can be no presumption that regional boundaries defined on the basis of different criteria will coincide. Each relational network has its own spatial reach, but while these may not be coincident, they may nonetheless mutually influence one another. Intra-regional heterogeneity and discontinuity implies that, metaphorically, the fabric of regions is torn and ragged. Consequently, the issue is not how and whether to draw lines around regions but to seek to understand the processes through which they are (re)produced (HUDSON, 1990).

There is no doubt that thinking about regions in these relational terms is productive. However, ALLEN et al. (1998, 143) have gone further and claimed that an adequate understanding of regions can “only” come about through conceptualising them as open, discontinuous, relational and internally diverse, thereby dismissing the notion of regions as bounded territories and suggesting that the territorial and the relational are either/or conceptions<sup>ii</sup>.

There is undoubtedly ample empirical evidence that, on average, the frequency, intensity and spatial reach of such extra-regional connections have tended to increase as the social relationships of capitalism have become more stretched and re-defined spaces in new ways. However, the density and geography of linkages can decline as well as increase in particular regions – for example, because of devalorisation and disinvestment decisions by

transnational companies or political decisions to seek a greater degree of regional closure precisely because of the character of extra-regional relations, linkages and distanced network relationships and the risks that these are seen to pose to the economic and social life of the region. Indeed recent research (see PIKE et al, 2006) has suggested that emphasising openness and connectivity as essential pre-requisites for regional economic growth may lead to problems of leakage, dispersal and structural incoherence in regional economies, thereby – albeit unintentionally – undermining their viability. Recognising these risks, social and political actors often seek to increase the extent of regional closure and represent regions as closed, continuous and internally homogeneous and, as such, more viable policy objects and legitimate subjects seeking to shape policy. Consequently, while many of the social relations that help constitute regions traverse their immanent boundaries and enrol extra-regional actors in the process of regionalisation, these trans-boundary relationships may, in some cases, help produce coherent bounded regions and what may be termed “closure” (see also HUDSON, 2001, Chapter 8). The spatial extent of the territories to be enclosed can vary with context and purpose so that a scalar hierarchy of territories (generically, subnational, national, and supra-national) may and, characteristically, often does emerge as a result.

Thus in contrast to ALLEN et al (1998) I would argue that the relational and the (hierarchically scalar) territorial can be seen as both/and rather than either/or conceptions, and that ‘territorially embedded’ and ‘relational and unbounded’ conceptions of regions are complementary alternatives, and that

actually existing regions are a product of a struggle and tension between territorialising and de-territorialising processes. Depending upon the circumstances and the specific situation of particular regions, policy and politics may be informed by a bounded territorial and hierarchical conception or by a relational conception that emphasises a flat ontology of networked connections as the more appropriate perspective from which to view the region..

How is regional economic development to be defined?

For much of the time and for many people, the definition of regional economic development is a non-issue: the meaning and substance of 'the economy' is seen as self-evident. The development of a regional economy is defined by growth in output, especially productivity and output per caput, and if this is accompanied by some growth in employment, so much the better. However, the key indicators of development are output and productivity – or in other words, regional economic development is defined as regional economic growth, and growth in the formal mainstream economy at that. There is nothing inherently 'wrong' with such a definition but it does severely circumscribe thinking about, and the definitions of, both 'economy' and 'development'. Given this rather emaciated and limited mainstream definition of economic development, it is important to recognise that many regions are doomed to under-perform against centrally-set targets and in relation to national growth rates. Uneven development is an integral component of capitalist economies and while some regions will exceed national (or other)



growth rates and targets, others will not. In other words some will 'fail' as part of the price of others 'succeeding'. Consequently, there is no 'win-win' neo-liberal golden age leading to regional convergence, let alone even development

Furthermore, the mainstream view pays scant, if any, attention to issues of consumption, living conditions and lifestyle and to distributional issues as central to development, and there are strong grounds for arguing that issues of social and environmental justice and equity must be central to any sustainable economic development strategy. Indeed, issues such as quality of food and life, linked to regionalised supply chains, are finding their way onto the developmental agenda as part of alternative "bottom up" approaches to development policy in several parts of Europe (HADJIMICHALIS and HUDSON, 2007). Such shifts in thinking are important because even in those successful regions – not least the 'superstar' regions (PERRONS, 2004, 202-37) - that are deemed to have 'succeeded', there are issues of intra-regional inequality, poverty, and poor living and environmental conditions as a consequence of the inequitable distributions of the 'goods' and 'bads' that are integral to the practices of the capitalist economy (for example, see MASSEY, 2006). This emphasises that regions, both in general and in relation to particular regions, are amenable to multiple simultaneous representation, as both "winners" and "losers", "successful" and "failing", depending upon the audience, context and purpose.

Moreover, the mainstream view defines substantial swathes of socially-useful activity that can be summarised under rubrics such as the social economy, or Third Sector, as irrelevant to the development debate. Defining 'development' in terms of GDP/caput and productivity in the mainstream economy squeezes out consideration of a range of social economy approaches, from 'near market' social enterprises to more traditional voluntary sector charities that have the capacity to create socially useful work, producing socially useful products and services, but within metrics other than those of the mainstream economy. While surpluses may be produced, they do not become profits – they may be expressed in metrics such as units of time, for example, or distributed via non-monetary exchange. Eliminating such activities from the definition of 'economy' is a quite critical manoeuvre as such activities are often proportionally of greater importance in regions that have become peripheral to the main circuits of capital accumulation and the mainstream economy. It is, therefore, important that the economy be re-thought to include rather than exclude them and for regional development policy to reflect this movement. Put another way, re-thinking "the economy" in these ways foregrounds the central political question of "who counts in the economy?"

There *is* some evidence of exploring such policy solutions and conceptions but, typically, very much as a last resort, part of a politics of despair to be tried only when all else has failed in problem regions. Often such moves reflect deep concern by national (and to a degree in the EU, supra-national quasi-) states to legitimate their own position by being seen to act (if not care), of having tried the mainstream solutions and found them seriously wanting, to be

open to new and different policy approaches, rather than expressing a genuine commitment to exploring alternative paths and trajectories to those of the mainstream economy and conceptions of development. Moreover, the impoverished condition of these regions militates against the development of a vibrant social economy there, even more so if this is seen as a subversive development, undermining the mainstream.

As well as re-thinking the economy in these ways, there is also a need to re-think development so as, for example, to give much more weight to questions of distribution and equity and issues such as health and well-being (PIKE et al, this issue). Not least, this helps recover consideration of the question of what the economy is *for*, what its social purposes are and ought to be, what values and principles inform and underlie conceptions of development, rather than there being a one-dimensional concern with growth per se. This in turn could, for example, encompass a greater sensitivity to issues of environmental and social justice and sustainability as central to the regional developmental agenda<sup>iii</sup>. Put another way, re-thinking “development” in these ways foregrounds the central political questions of “development for whom?” – a question rendered more complex and slippery as a result of recognition of the multiple and shifting identities of individuals -, of “whose values and principles shape the dominant conceptions of development and how do they do so?” and “through which modalities of power are these dominant conceptions established and secured?”.

Recognising the limits to the region and the regional

Creating the space for these re-thought and revised conceptions of region, economy and development to become the basis of new forms of regional policies and practice will certainly require a parallel radical re-thinking of appropriate forms of politics and a thorough critique of the modalities of power through which they are practised. The 'old' models of representative democracy certainly remain relevant but there is a pressing need both to re-vamp them and to build upon and go beyond them. This would involve – inter alia - exploring more participatory forms of democratic practice and opening up more open and transparent fora for political decision making beyond as well as within the formal structures of party politics. In many regions, especially those blighted by economic decline and characterised by a degree of introspection and political conservatism, this may prove the biggest challenge of all. The dominance of politics and policy decision making by 'the usual suspects', those familiar but shadowy dominant figures in both public and private sectors (typically male, middle-aged and grey-suited) who regularly appear as the decisive actors who reach the key decisions behind closed doors and who pursue their interests via coercion, inducement and manipulation as well as appeals to that more visible authority, needs to be broken (for example, see ROBINSON et al, 2000).

While recognising the positive developmental potential that may, therefore, be embodied in a 'regional' approach to development, it is equally important to recognise the limits to the regional, and insist that the national state continues to acknowledge its responsibilities for the social and economic well-being of

its citizens, wherever they live. For example, as RODRIGUEZ–POSE and GILL (2004, 2115) conclude, “(regional) devolution per se will ...not deliver greater territorial equity. This objective would require the establishment of substantial interterritorial fiscal equalisation systems at the national or supranational level if the persistence and permanence of economic disparities are not to become one of the hallmarks of future geographies”. More generally, the national state remains pivotal and often decisive in shaping the character and extent of sub-national governance and economic and social development (PIKE and TOMANEY, 2004, 2093). Acknowledging the force of this point, however, it is equally important to stress that the state apparatus cannot be simply and non-problematically ‘captured’ to address the needs of the mass of the population of peripheralised regions. The key issues then become the architecture of the system of governing, the social bases of power and its distribution, and the modalities of the power relations between the regional and national within, but also beyond, the structures of the state.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, it is vital that re-thinking of the region acknowledges and seeks to deal with two messy but vital political realities. First, the enduring dilemmas of seeking to pursue simultaneously a politics of recognition that recognises respects the legitimacy of regional identities and peoples’ identification with “their region” and one of redistribution that seeks to reduce, if not eliminate, material disparities in economic well-being and living conditions between regions (see Fraser, 1995). Secondly, that this re-thinking escapes the myth of a unified (and unifying) regional interest and explicitly acknowledges the existence different -

and at times openly competitive, grounded in different class structural positions and other sources of social power – interests held by individuals and social groups living in the same space. Within such an agonistic politics, which interests prevail and which are prioritised in state policy agendas would be seen as the outcome of overtly political struggle based on a recognition of legitimate (or at least legally sanctioned) difference – often grounded in structurally asymmetrical power relations - rather than a presumption of homogeneity of interest on the basis of a shared regional identity. Recognition of this emphasises that progress towards greater territorial justice would need to unpack the modalities of power that underwrite existing injustices and grapple with more complex spatialities than simply those of inter-regional relations.

In this context it is worth noting the radical experiments in “participatory budgeting” that originated in Porto Alegre in Brazil in the late 1980s and subsequently diffused to other locations, including several in Europe (see HADJIMICHALIS and HUDSON, 2007). Via this process of radical re-definition of the democratic involvement, citizens are actively involved in the decision-making processes that shape the regions in which they live.

Conclusions?

‘Conclusions’ is perhaps rather too grand a term so let me simply end by saying that it seems to me that in thinking about the future of studies of the region and regional development, these are some of the sorts of issues that

critical social scientists need to focus upon. But because these are issues that reach into the fabric of daily life for many people, especially those in those regions designated as 'peripheral' – indeed even 'ultra-peripheral', such as the Azores and Canaries in the EU (EURISLES, 2002) - they have a significance that reaches far beyond the realms of the academy and academic debate. Above all, they are – and need to be seen as – political issues that, moreover, often raise quite profound questions about modalities of power, the nature of politics and the political process itself. On the one hand, regions and the people resident in them have typically been seen as both subjects vulnerable to the whim of capital's (dis)investment decisions and as the objects of state policies that, ostensibly at least, were intended to counter the worst effects of capital flight and place specific devalorisation. On the other hand, moves to decentralise responsibility – and maybe even power and resources, or perhaps more accurately, as ALLEN (2003) would have it, the effects of power that resources of various sorts enable – to regions to allow people there better to formulate their own socio-economic development strategies typically presume the existence of a shared regional interest – which is rarely if ever a valid assumption – and run the risk that the blame for continuing socio-economic development problems will thereby be shifted to the region and its inhabitants. What is needed is a rather different model and understanding of politics and practice that recognises that simply living in the same region does not confer identity of interest but also that in many regions the regional capacity to shift regional development trajectories onto a 'higher and better' path is strictly limited precisely because of their location within the structural relations of capitalist development. .

As a result, there is an enduring need for the analytic perspectives of political economy that emphasise the systemic character of regional uneven development in order better to understand these limits. Equally, there needs to be a multi-scalar policy response that conjoins regional, national and supra-national state policies in an intelligent way and that maybe also links these policies to the activities of a range of non-state organisations to address problems in specific regions. In turn, such a shift of policy and practice requires a conceptualisation of regions as social and material constructions, as path-dependent but always provisional and emergent rather than final, as encompassing variety and heterogeneity of interest, and as necessarily open and linked to other regions. Without falling into the trap of equating path dependency with a deterministic iron law of history, it is important to recognise that historical legacies are important and that path dependency constrains – if not determines – the future developmental possibilities of regions. In short, moving towards a more even map of regional development will be – at best – a long drawn out process, characterised by at least as many steps backwards and sideways as forwards in the search for a politics that both recognises and respects the right to regional identity and specificity while seeking to redress the material inequalities of regional uneven development and wrestles with the dilemmas of seeking to deal simultaneously with issues of recognition and redistribution (cf. FRASER, 1995).

Indeed, recognising these enduring dilemmas, it is important to emphasise that there is not a single “high road” to which there is no alternative and to



which all must aspire – and so strive and compete for the resources seen as essential to attaining this goal. Arguments that this is the case, that there is no alternative, need to be vigorously contested. Certainly there are limits that are an unavoidable consequence of the dominance of capitalist social relations – and in this sense very limited scope for transformatory as opposed to affirmative political strategies (FRASER, 1995) - but this does not mean that there are no possibilities for political choices within these parameters. So, in contrast, and instead of deterministic inevitability, the emphasis should be placed firmly upon political choice and the political possibilities offered by recognition of multiple paths and developmental trajectories and modalities of power, upon the potential for context-dependent and sensitive policies that acknowledge both varying historical trajectories and the constraints and possibilities that these present to future development, and upon the varying aspirations and goals of regional residents.

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<sup>i</sup> There are clear resonances here with the doxic qualities of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus and Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony.

<sup>ii</sup> Although see ALLEN (2003), 172-4) for a more qualified view on the issue of closure and boundaries.

<sup>iii</sup> Clearly, there are major debates as to the precise meaning of contested terms such as sustainability and environmental and social justice but it is sufficient here simply to note that these are issues that need to be considered in thinking about development alongside narrower concerns with economic efficiency, productivity and growth rates.

