# City-regions: new geographies of uneven development and inequality

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Postprint / Postprint
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article


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|---|---|
| Journal: | *Regional Studies* |
| Manuscript ID: | CRES-2006-0079.R2 |
| Manuscript Type: | Main Section |
| JEL codes: | R11 - Regional Economic Activity: Growth, Development, and Changes < R1 - General Regional Economics < R - Urban, Rural, and Regional Economics, R23 - Regional Migration\|Regional Labor Markets\|Population < R2 - Household Analysis < R - Urban, Rural, and Regional Economics, R58 - Regional Development Policy < R5 - Regional Government Analysis < R - Urban, Rural, and Regional Economics |
| Keywords: | New Regionalism , Devolution , City-Regions, Labour Markets, Inequality , Low-Pay |
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# City-Regions:
# New Geographies of Uneven Development and Inequality

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First received: April 2006
Accepted: October 2007

## Abstract

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning literature on the 'new regionalism'. Protagonists have made persuasive arguments on regions as successful models of economic and social development. We argue that the championing of 'city-regions' provides an opportunity for taking these debates further. We draw on research taking place on the Sheffield City-Region and particularly discuss the interrelationships between competitiveness, work-welfare regimes-those policies and strategies dealing with labour market governance and welfare state restructuring-labour market inequalities and low pay. The paper suggests that city-regions reinforce, and have the potential to increase, rather than resolve, uneven development and socio-spatial inequalities.



New Regionalism *, Devolution *, City-Regions *, Labour Markets *, Inequality *, Low-Pay *

R11. R23, R58


Les Cités-Régions: de nouvelles géographies du déséquilibre et de l'inégalité.

Etherington & Jones


Pendant les dernières années, on a témoigné de la croissance d'une documentation sur le 'nouveau régionalisme'. Les partisans ont prôné la région comme modèle du développement économique et social. Cet article cherche à affirmer que se faire le champion des 'cités-régions' donne la possibilité d'approfondir ce débat. En puisant dans les recherches faites à propos de la cité-région de Sheffield, on discute en particulier de la corrélation entre la compétitivité, les actions travail-assistance sociale - à savoir, les politiques et stratégies qui traitent de la maîtrise du marché du travail et de la restructuration de la protection sociale - les inégalités sur le marché du travail et les petits salaires. L'article laisse supposer que les cités-régions renforcent, et ont le potentiel d'augmenter plutôt que de résoudre, le déséquilibre et les inégalités socio-géographiques.



Nouveau régionalisme / Régionalisation / Cités-Régions / Marchés du travail / Inégalité / Petits salaires

Classement JEL: R11; R23; R58


**Stadtregionen: Neue Geografien von ungleichmäßiger Entwicklung und Ungleichheit**

David Etherington and Martin Jones

**Abstract**

In den letzten Jahren ist eine aufkeimende Literatur über den 'neuen Regionalismus' entstanden. Ihre Autoren haben Regionen mit überzeugenden Argumenten als erfolgreiche Modelle der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Entwicklung dargestellt. Wir argumentieren, dass die Förderung von 'Stadtregionen' eine Chance bietet, um diese Debatten einen Schritt weiter zu führen. Für unseren Beitrag nutzen wir Forschungsarbeiten in der Stadtregion von Sheffield und erörtern insbesondere die wechselseitigen Beziehungen zwischen Wettbewerbsfähigkeit, Arbeits- und Sozialplänen (also den Politiken und Strategien zur Lenkung des Arbeitsmarkts und zur Umstrukturierung des Sozialstaats), Ungleichheit auf dem Arbeitsmarkt und Niedriglöhnen. Wir argumentieren, dass Stadtregionen eine ungleichmäßige Entwicklung und sozioräumliche Ungleichheit verstärken und potenziell noch erhöhen, statt sie abzubauen.

Neuer Regionalismus
Dezentralisierung
Stadtregionen
Arbeitsmärkte
Ungleichheit
Niedriglöhne

R11. R23, R58

Ciudad-regiones:
nuevas geografías, desarrollo desequilibrado y desigualdades
David Etherington and Martin Jones

**Abstract**

En los últimos años hemos observado una literatura floreciente sobre el ‘nuevo regionalismo’. Los autores han defendido las regiones con argumentos persuasivos de modelos prósperos del desarrollo económico y social. Aquí defendemos que al apoyar las ‘ciudad-regiones’ se brinda la oportunidad de ampliar estos debates aún más. Basamos nuestros datos en estudios llevados a cabo en la ciudad-región de Sheffield y abordamos en particular las interrelaciones entre competitividad, las políticas sobre trabajo y bienestar (es decir, las políticas y estrategias para la gobernanza del mercado laboral y la reestructuración del estado del bienestar), las desigualdades del mercado laboral y los salarios bajos. En este artículo sugerimos que las ciudad-regiones refuerzan, y potencialmente aumentan, el desequilibrio del desarrollo y las desigualdades socio espaciales en vez de evitarlo.

Nuevo regionalismo
Transferencia de competencias
Ciudad-regiones
Mercados de trabajo
Desigualdad

Salarios bajos

R11. R23, R58

# City-Regions: New Geographies of Uneven Development and Inequality

## Introduction

Once again cities are the focus of attention. In the late 1990s, the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Core Cities Group to examine the interaction of cities and regions and explore how they could stimulate economic growth within the regions (Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies 1999). The report discussed the concept of the 'city-region' (CR) and its possibilities and constraints for reducing endemic spatial inequalities within the UK[1]. In state discourse, city-regions are, of course, not new. As Western European experience over the past half a century has demonstrated, this 'metropolitan concept' normally follows in the wake of failed attempts to build stable 'regional units' of state intervention (Dickinson 1967). We have been here before, and we will probably come here again. Following the findings of the CURDS study, and in parallel with other research, the idea of city-region *competitiveness* was developed further by an ODPM Working Group emphasising certain specific policy areas, in particular skills, knowledge, innovation, enterprise and competition as the drivers of growth (ODPM 2003; see also SURF 2003).

The CR idea has gained much currency and is now in the vanguard of potential solutions to reducing uneven development and its manifestation as the North-South

[1] The notion of 'city-region' is interpreted in this paper as "the area over which key economic markets, such as labour markets as measured by travel to work areas, housing markets and retail markets, operate" (HM Treasury et al 2006: 8). The city-region is thus the 'economic footprint' of the city; a 'fuzzy' concept that indicates a stretched-out or relational space that does not always correspond to administrative city boundaries (Robson et al 2006). City-regions have been referred to elsewhere as metropolitan regions (compare Brenner 2004; Harding 2007; Jonas and Ward 2007a, 2007b; McGuirk 2007).

Divide. In 2004, for instance, the 'Northern Way' was encouraged by the ODPM comprising the three northern Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) One North East, Yorkshire Forward and North West RDA, with the aim of "bridging the £29 billion output gap" and restructure the Northern economy on a more competitive footing (see Gonzalez 2006; Goodchild and Hickman 2006). Indeed, competitiveness is the dominant theme and underlying principle on which the 'Northern Way Growth Strategy' was based. Citing the Spending Review[2]:

> "The best way to overcome regional disparities in productivity and employment rates is to allow each nation, region and locality the freedom and flexibility and funding to exploit their indigenous sources of growth" (Northern Way 2004: 1).

Within this pursuit of reducing regional and urban disparities, the Northern Way identified eight city-regions in the North (Liverpool, Central Lancashire, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull and Humber Ports, Tees Valley, and Tyne and Wear) as the basis for fulfilling its strategic growth objectives, championed by HM Treasury as part of the *Devolving Decision Making* agenda:

> "*Cities represent the spatial manifestation of economic activity*—large, urban agglomerations in which business choose to locate in order to benefit from proximity to other business, positive spillovers and external economies of scale … [*C*]*ities can contribute to competitive regions*, stimulating growth and employment, promoting excellence in surrounding areas and joining up separate business hubs to expand existing markets and create new ones … [T]his document extends the analysis and understanding of the economic role of *cities and regions in lifting regional and national growth, and tackling disparities between places*" (HM Treasury et al 2006: 1, emphasis added).

[2] In the UK, 'Spending Reviews' set Departmental Expenditure Limits and, through Public Service Agreements (PSA), define the key improvements that the public can expect from these resources. They are instruments for enabling centralised control and also creating spaces of regional/local expectation, set within constrained limits. Based on outputs, as opposed to inputs, we would argue that this 'scalar compact' is a constrained form of devolution (cf. HM Treasury et al 2007).

This agenda is currently being pursued by (the Department of) Communities and Local Government (DCLG 2006a, 2006b, 2007; HM Treasury et al 2007) as part of a *new local state framework*, which emphasises a balanced competitiveness agenda of bringing lagging cities/regions to a common baseline without disturbing the strategic and dominant position of leading cities/regions. The framework for this is to be set by City Development Companies—city-wide economic development institutions formed to drive economic growth and regeneration in the English city-regions. Whether all this reorientation of urban and regional policy, which we might tentatively call the 'hollowing out' of regional economic governance (upwards to pan-regionalism, downwards to cities, and outwards to more relational city-regions), will produce positive dividends is a pressing question for regional studies and is the subject of debate in this journal (compare Goodchild and Hickman 2006; Goodwin et al 2005; Kitson et al 2004; Malecki 2004; Parr 2005; Turok 2004) and elsewhere (Hall and Pain 2006; Harrison 2007; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2006; Tewdwr-Jones and McNeill 2000). Critical here are those enquiries questioning the benefits, distributional consequences, and pivotal inter-linkages of growth strategies with the wider socioeconomic environment, which are never adequately specified in accounts promoting city-regions. Moreover, the mobilisation of city-regions has the potential to have adverse and damaging impacts in terms of social and labour market inequalities (cf. HM Treasury et al 2006: 4), and this paper explores how this new scale of governance and regulation can *reinforce rather than resolve* the problems of uneven development and socio-spatial inequalities.

We use Sheffield as a case study to discuss all this. Sheffield represents a particularly interesting example of a British city struggling with the policy discourses of city-

regional competitiveness, because its employment and occupational structure has been transformed over the past 20 years from a high paid employment economy with a plentiful supply of skilled jobs in the steel and engineering industries, to a de-industrialised economy where many of the new jobs created in the service sector tend to be low paid (on these trends in general, see Danson 2005). Despite this, and like many other rustbelt city-regions in Britain, Sheffield (and its broader Yorkshire and Humberside region—part of the Northern Way) is frequently presented as a laboratory for nurturing a sustainable skills and knowledge-based economy (compare Booth 2005; Crouch and Hill 2004; Lee 2002; Robson et al 2000; Sheffield One 2005; Yorkshire-Forward 2003). Interestingly, Sheffield is ranked seventeenth in the economic performance table on English city-regions and seventh in the employment performance table (HM Treasury et al 2006: 26, 30). We, however, feel that this hides the qualitative micro-economic and social geographies of this complex city-region and specifically glosses over issues such as the quality and sustainability of the employment base and inequality more broadly (on these points, see also Jonas and Ward 2007b; South Yorkshire Partnership 2005).

The remainder of this paper develops this argument through a series of interlocking layers[3]. The next section situates our arguments within current new regionalist academic discussion. This is followed by an analysis of the development of the Sheffield City-Region, its strategies, and here we outline how Sheffield's economy and labour market is represented within policy documents, including those produced

[3] The research encompasses a variety of qualitative research strategies: semi-structured face-to-face interviews with a wide-range of political and policy actors, welfare-rights organisations and training providers; focus groups with benefit recipients; and content analysis of policy documents, and narrative policy analysis more broadly. This was undertaken between 2002 and 2006.

by regional scale institutions. The paper then attempts to draw out the nature of social inequality and poverty within the Sheffield city-region. It firstly examines the construction of a city-region narrative on the knowledge-based economy and the benefits therein, before secondly probing on the politics of poverty and uneven development, and thirdly how this city-region is reinforcing processes and patterns of labour market inequalities and social exclusion. We conclude with an appraisal of the findings for a variety of debates.

**New Regionalisms, City-Regions, Uneven Development**

Recent years have certainly witnessed a burgeoning literature on the 'new regionalism' in the social and political sciences (see Boudreau 2003; Brenner et al 2003; Keating 1998, 2001; Keating et al 2003; Rossi 2004; Söderbaum 2004; Storper 1997; Väyrynen 2003). Protagonists, both at an academic (e.g. Scott 1998, 2001) and political level (e.g. HM Treasury et al 2003; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003, 2004), have made important arguments on the existence of regions, and city-regions more recently, as successful models of economic development in an increasingly post-national age. Given the increasing context of economic globalisation and the so-called 'borderless' and relational nature of transactions across the contemporary world, the new regionalism captures a belief that site and place-specific scales of intervention can firstly anchor and secondly nurture nodes of dense economic, social and political activity (compare Storper 1997; Cooke and Morgan 1998).

This position has been delicately summarised in this journal by Scott and Storper (2003). For Scott and Storper, globalisation is challenging the scalar macro-economic

planning and development integrity of the nation state. By focusing on heterodox and endogenous ways of doing economic development, "government agencies, civic associations, private-public partnerships, or a host of other possible institutional arrangements, depending on local traditions and political sensibilities" armed with supply-side innovation strategies are considered appropriate for mobilising and promoting a 'regional economic commons' to capitalise on the increasingly localised agglomeration and the intense clustering of economic activity. Given this persuasive argument, it is not hard to see why city-regions, i.e. metropolitan-scaled clusters of socioeconomic importance (see Scott et al 2001), are being presented as selective 'windows of locational opportunity' for capturing and developing an specialised reordering and rescaling of economic activity (Scott and Storper 2003: 587). In short, city-regions are coming to function as the basic motors of the global economy—a proposition that points as a corollary to the further important notion that globalisation and city-region development are but two facets of a single integrated reality (Scott 2001; Scott et al 2001).

Those seeking to engage with these claims have been suggesting for a while now a need to consider several issues. First, there are those authors pointing to the continued significance of national state power in underpinning regional and city-regional competitiveness strategies, and particularly their dynamics and future trajectories (compare Harrison 2006; Hudson 1999, 2005, 2006; Lovering 1999; Musson et al 2005). In turn, attention has been paid to the links between the state and the political economy of scale, and the ways in which regions have limited capacities to act and are embedded in a politics of territory and crisis-management more broadly (Brenner 2004; Jones and MacLeod 1999; Jones 2001; Larner and Walter 2002;

MacLeod 2001). Second, others have been concerned with defining and delimiting regions, and analysing the ways in which they emerge, become institutionalised, and sometimes even disappear (MacLeod 2001; MacLeod and Jones 2001; Paasi 2002, 2004). This has, thirdly, precipitated literatures more interested in issues of identity, senses of place, and regions as spaces of territorial belonging (Budd 2005; Jones and MacLeod 2004; MacLeod 1998). In short, this academic critique has questioned the geographical generalisations and reifications produced by a global city-region thesis as the paradigm shift for economic growth.

Fourth, and at a lower level of abstraction, a group of authors have been concerned with stressing the importance of connections between the economic geographies of cities and the development of regions and regional systems (Deas and Ward 2000, 2002; Herreschel and Newman 2002; Leibovitz 2003; Pastor et al 2000). As noted above, this latter topic is currently being hotly debated in the UK with political lobbying for explicit city-regions as solutions to economic and democratic deficits (HM Treasury et al 2006; New Local Government Network 2005; and below). Fifth, and related to this, economic geographers have been interested in exploring the connections between firms and regions, which has surprisingly been played-down in debates on economic governance and softer approaches to regional studies—much to the annoyance of authors such as Markusen (1999). Notable here is the work of authors interested in systems of learning and innovation, how these make regions and city-regions work, and also how structures of spatial regulation and governance can nurture this to provide (or not provide) the atmosphere for such developments (Bristow 2004; Cooke 2003; MacKinnon et al 2002; Martin and Sunley 2003; Maskell 2001). Collectively, this body of critique has allowed us to focus on economic

linkages and from this to tease out the internal dynamics within regions and city-regions.

Our paper is situated within all this and specifically engages with an emerging sixth literature within regional studies—one which critiques the new regionalism from an often neglected *socioeconomic stance*. Important here has been the work of MacLeod (2000), Donald (2001), Christopherson (2003), Turok and Edge (1999) and Ward and Jonas (Jonas and Ward 2002, 2007a; Ward and Jonas 2004) on the conflicts between securing economic competitiveness for city-regions and managing the everyday politics of collective consumption and social reproduction in these mobilised spaces. Building on the literature discussed above, and fusing this with the writings of authors such as Castells and Harvey, Ward and Jonas argue that new regionalist literatures are myopic because they focus heavily on supply-side aspects of global-regional economic development and city-regional capacities are accordingly treated as functional to the needs of this model of neoliberal growth and change. This significantly dodges issues of inequality, redistribution, conflict, counterstrategies, and politics more broadly. They shift our attention away from spectacle of globalisation and the reordering of political-economic space—as read through those literatures cited above—towards more micro-scaled city-regional socioeconomic geographies. In short, for Jonas and Ward

> "there has been an under-emphasis in the city-region literature on how new territorial forms are constructed politically and reproduced through everyday acts and struggles around consumption and social reproduction. An especially notable lacuna is serious treatment of the role of the state and an associated politics of distribution constructed around various sites, spaces and scales across the city-region. In some respects, this silence on matters of politics and collective social agency arises from a tendency to reify the city-region itself as an agent of wealth creation and distribution. This comes at the expense of

> knowledge about the people, interests, and socio-political agents who populate and work in city-regions" (Jonas and Ward 2007a: 170).

They make a call for several research agendas under the heading 'geographies of collective provision' (Ward and Jonas 2004) and 'ordinary geographies' (Jonas and Ward 2007a)—with both seeking to captured the 'lived' and 'living city'. These are: the links between economic, social and political governance, labour control, service provision, welfare policies, democracy, the politics of the urban environment, and sustainability. Engaging with this, they argue, will allow for a more rounded and holistic view of sub-national state territorialities (Jonas and Ward 2002; Ward and Jonas 2004; also Jonas 1996).

This approach is extremely important in that it acknowledges the much neglected links between city-regions and the politics and outcomes of uneven development (see also Cox 2004; Krueger and Savage 2007; McCann 2007; McGuirk 2007; Purcell 2007). City-regions as 'new state spaces' (or perhaps more accurately described as *reconstructions* of existing forms of metropolitan governance) embody alliances and social forces engaged in strategy formation responding to processes of economic restructuring, social inequalities, as well as promoting competitive advantage. However, as Brenner observes there are limitations and deep contradictory outcomes to this:

> "For in their current, market-led forms, metropolitan institutions likewise tend to intensify intra-national sociospatial inequality, uneven development and interspatial competition, and thus to undermine the territorial conditions for sustainable economic development. Moreover, despite their explicit attention to problems of interscalar coordination and meta-governance, metropolitan political institutions cannot, in themselves, resolve the pervasive governance failures, regulatory deficits and legitimation problems that ensue as public funds are spread out ever more thinly among a wide number of subnational entrepreneurial initiatives" (Brenner 2003: 317).

At a political and policy level, commenting on the 'rapid ascent of the city-regions agenda', this observation is supported and furthered by Gonzalez and colleagues.

> "The main risk in the particular interpretation of the city-region agenda … is its displacement of issues of uneven development and regional disparities by concentrating only on places that are doing well. This has at least three problematic consequences. First, the emphasis will be mainly on the urban core of the city-regions at the expense of secondary cities, smaller towns and remoter rural areas. Second, it will downplay the importance of the national scale as a frame where regional disparities are still (re)produced. Third, a reified view of scales is being used in this debate, one which assigns different functions to different scales" (Gonzalez et al 2006: 317).

Pushing a socioeconomic stance and sensitive to the consequences of this state promoted uneven development, our approach to critical regional studies draws attention to city-regional entrepreneurialism, supply-side policies in the form of welfare-to-work and employability programmes, and the restructuring of labour control and reproduction through skills and training initiatives. This dominance of 'workfare'—where benefits are conditional of unemployed people participating on employment and training schemes—tends to be locked into managing decline and creating the conditions for the creation of surplus value, rather than preparing labour for new and sustainable employment opportunities. The effect of these policies, as highlighted in the research of Martin et al (2001), is to make labour markets more competitive through enhanced flexible vis-à-vis minimal regulations and in doing so reinforce their contingent nature. Workfare, because of its regulatory regime and frequent compulsion, removes any (supposedly) barriers to employers obtaining a ready supply of labour. Social groups who enter welfare-to-work and training programmes tend to be vulnerable and disadvantaged. The 'work first' principle tends to give prominence to the first job offer and the assumption that work will be sustained and there will be some sort of upward mobility. Workfare in turn increases

competition, or 'workfare churning', as a result of substitution as subsidized employment is used to replace 'real' jobs. The direction of the unemployed to low-paid work creates a 'crowding' effect on the labour market, which puts even more downward pressures on wages in certain sectors (for perspectives on these issues, see Peck and Theodore 2000). To paraphrase Fine (2001), there is a continuing imperative of value theory in advanced capitalism.

To summarise our contention, then, city-regional strategies tend to pay scant attention to the distributional consequences of competitive policies—there is little focus on the nature and extent of poverty and social inequality, the need to establish poverty reduction targets, and any assessment of how policies are likely to reduce poverty rates. The discourses and representation by 'hegemonic interests' of CR spaces in relation to how problems are analysed and policy solutions offered are of crucial importance to shaping policy agendas. As Jessop has argued:

> "The entrepreneurial city or region has been constructed through the intersection of diverse economic, political and socio cultural narratives which seek to give meaning to current problems by construing them in terms of past failures and future possibilities" (Jessop 1997: 30).

We are also particularly concerned with addressing the call made by Harding (2007) for research to address the 'changing *material circumstances* of city-regions', in contrast to accounts 'reading off' city-regionalisms from a 'global neoliberal project'. The next section accordingly explores in more detail how some of these dominant economic narratives and representations are being produced in the Sheffield City-Region, before moving to analyse their impacts and effects.

**Building the Sheffield City-Region Narrative: 'New Urban Renaissance' and the Knowledge-Based Economy**

*The National Context*

> "*After decades of post-industrial malaise, Britain's cities are finally turning the corner*. Although some major cities still lag behind their European counterparts, our urban base has put the nadir of the 1980s behind it. Inner-city residency is now climbing, *wages are rising*, and there is a tangible sense of civic pride on the back of successful sporting events and cultural redevelopments … But while physical infrastructure is important*, human capital is the key to creating vibrant cities*" (Miliband and Hunt 2004: 23, emphasis added).

On the back of the so-called 'new urban renaissance'—a policy discourse that presents city-regions as exciting places to work, rest, and play, Britain is believed to be escaping the social and economic problems of the 1980s and 1990s. Accordingly, the Twenty-First Century is the era of the 'new urbanism' with 'creative city-regions' based on a new model of social and economic development that refashions the built environment and most importantly in the context of this paper, nurtures a 'knowledge-based economy' (KBE). On one level, the KBE is characterised by rising employment in financial services, high-technology and the ICT sector, media and the broader cultural economy, and the continued rise in self-employment (Thurow 1999). On another level, the KBE is about a new kind of labour market where deeply entrenched unemployment becomes a policy problem of the past, those *temporarily* involved in the bottom-end of the labour market are actively involved in training and welfare-to-work policies to increase employability and transferable skills, and a high proportion of the remaining workforce are engaged in knowledge-intensive industries and products as listed above (for reviews, see Jessop 2002a). In short, the 'nadir' of the past few decades is being left behind and up-and-coming city-regions based on

knowledge-based workers are the places to be (Hunt 2005a, 2005b). As MacLeod and Ward observe, this spatial-fix is often presented as nothing short of 'a new Eden for the informational age', though accounts rarely consider the corrosive impacts of neoliberal accumulation strategies and hegemonic projects on the social, economic and political fabric of city-regions (MacLeod and Ward 2002: 153).

*Regional Articulations: Strategic Directions for City-Regions*

As noted above, the Northern Way, comprising a loosely based coalition or network of government and quasi government agencies, was established in 2004 and charged with reducing the £30 billion output gap between the north and south of England. Its role has been to establish a strategic economic development programme for the North as well as act as a pressure organisation to influence public investment across the regions. Its establishment coincided and indeed was influenced by the Government's CR agenda and in 2005 provided the framework for identifying and establishing eight city-regions (including Sheffield) in the North. Each CR is responsible for producing City Region Development Programmes (CRDP) and reflects a shift in focus away from reducing the North-South Divide to the role of cities as engines and locations of economic growth and vitality (cf. Goodchild and Hickman 2006).

Gonzalez's evaluation of the Northern Way found that as an organisation it was a 'weak concept' and in many respects it was unrealistic to develop a loosely based partnership or coalition that would effectively bring together territorially, as well as economically and politically, such diverse interests. However, through its emphasis on competitive cities discourses, the Northern Way has successfully diverted attention *away* from any debate about redistribution and regional disparities. For example, "the

strong focus on economic growth and competitiveness is complemented by a light touch on the environment and passing concern for issues of social cohesion and inclusion…….although the Northern Way does acknowledge the territorial imbalances between London and the South East and the North of England it does not seem to address the existing disparities within the North or the potential disparities that the Northern Way might cause" (Gonzalez 2006: 23, 24).

Almost perversely the analysis provided by the various policy agendas coming out of the Northern Way and CR programmes seems to conceptualise the North as something as an economic millstone around the country's neck, which can only be 'released' if it got its act together or pulled its socks up. Thus the Northern Way "epitomises a move away from a redistributive logic between the South and the North by partially turning the regional divide around, arguing that the underperformance of the North is 'holding back the UK's international competitiveness and is inequitable" (Gonzalez 2006: 11).

Alongside this, in February 2006, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) introduced *City Strategies* to deliver an improvement in the working age employment rate, particularly for disadvantaged groups such as benefit claimants, lone parents, disabled people and those with health conditions, older people and people from minority ethnic groups. The City Strategy focuses on the more deprived urban centres and invites the key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors to come together into a concerted local programme—a 'consortium'—to improve the way support for individual jobless people is coordinated and delivered on the ground. Already a number of CRs (or quasi CRs) including Sheffield have received Pathfinder

Status and this is the clearest expression of the way the state is attempting *to* rescale labour market policy and consolidate the supply-side agenda within city-regions. We discuss this further below.

*Discourses and Representations of Sheffield's Labour Market—Talking up the 'New Revival'*

The Sheffield City-Region is currently in the making and encompasses South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire, thus uniquely cutting across two RDA boundaries (Yorkshire Forward and East Midlands). Building on the critiques of the new regionalism noted above, this act questions the 'natural' status of a political space created by central-government diktat and political fiat. Also, and connecting further with the lines of academic enquiry noted above, when probing on the internal dynamics of this, the Sheffield City-Region comprises two Sub Regional Partnerships (South Yorkshire Partnership and Alliance Sub Regional Strategic Partnership). In addition to the two RDAs and two SRPs, there are eight local authorities and the Peak Planning Board. Within these, there are additional numerous strategies and local strategic partnerships/neighbourhood partnerships based around Single Regeneration Programmes. In short 'governance complexity' is taking place, based on different rounds of 'filling in' (Goodwin et al 2005) the sub-national state apparatus for the business of doing economic development and striving to deliver economic growth. The 'City Region Development Programme' (CRDP) reflects the overall growth orientations as set down by the Northern Way. Four priority interventions are outlined:

- Developing knowledge and research on an internationally competitive scale;
- Developing a comprehensive connectivity strategy;

- Providing the skills required by an internationally competitive economy;
- Creating an environment to encourage investment and higher quality of life.

(South Yorkshire Partnership/Alliance Sub Regional Strategic Partnership 2005: 14)

The CRDP states that there are barriers to growth, economic activity rates are 'patchy', and that levels of mobility "depend upon a package that addresses each of the specific barriers in deprived communities—including public transport, childcare and 'bridging learning to Learners'" (South Yorkshire Partnership/Alliance Sub Regional Strategic Partnership 2005: 18). Plugging the skills mismatch is also seen as a high priority. The CRDP also recognises that "renewed targeting at the most deprived communities is required to better connect them to the larger pool of jobs and services across the city region" (ibid: 24). As we discuss below—and connecting with those academic debates above stressing the connections between power, crisis-management, and the politics of scale—the ability of Sheffield's city-regional policymakers to address all this is proving very difficult given the limited levers and drivers available to shape and steer economic activity in a meaningful manner.

With respect to labour market opportunities, the Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward) has already begun to 'talk up' the prospects of the regional economy. To give one example of this, it is claimed that

> "*Yorkshire & Humber has a robust, diverse and bullish economy … Yorkshire's power is it's people*, our 2.5 million strong workforce leads the country in sectors as varied as advanced engineering, food production, bioscience and digital technologies. *Unemployment is at a 30 year low and the same as the national average*" (Yorkshire-Forward 2005: 1, emphasis added).

Elsewhere, there is an upbeat tone about how the Sheffield City-Region and its knowledge-based economy should be seen and narrated, which reinforces the strategies of Yorkshire-Forward. An implicit 'inter-textuality' (Fairclough 2001) could be seen to be at work, whereby through repeated statements, discourses on the economy develop an almost scientific truth status with respect to the benefits of neoliberal accumulation strategies, which is in turn used to justify local state intervention. The *Sheffield City Strategy 2002-2005*, for instance, asserts that:

> "As late as 1999 it was legitimate to pose the question –'can Sheffield re-discover the inventiveness which previously made it a world wide brand, or is the City locked in a downward spiral in which talented people and organisations will progressively migrate elsewhere?' *By 2002 there was convincing evidence that such questions are now irrelevant—the City has turned the decisive corner and is now 'on the up*'" (Sheffield First 2003: 10, emphasis added).

Beyond glossy images and photographs taken with soft-focus enhancing qualities, the 'convincing evidence' on 'turning the decisive corner' is never really presented. Whilst this promotion of the city is in some ways understandable given the need, from the perspective of Sheffield First Partnership (SFP), to represent an 'image' which will attract inward investment, this appears to be at the expense of an understanding, and indeed an analysis, of the daily lives and experiences of people living in poverty. For example the SFP Social Inclusion Strategy, launched in 2002, barely acknowledged the existence and persistence of poverty. Linked to this, there has been a lack of an attempt to seek to understand the dynamics of 'worklessness' in the Sheffield City-Region and how it relates to social exclusion. For example, the Open Forum for Economic Regeneration (OFFER), a community based coalition that has representation on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), commented:

> "The City Regional Development Plan still doesn't appear to be making the connections with community needs particularly around issues like worklessness and in some cases seems to be asking the Government for things which have already been approved, e.g. support to establish the new Adult Skills & Work Board" (Interview, OFFER Officer, 2005).

As we discuss below, both 'worklessness' and low pay are crucial ingredients of the landscape of social inequality in the Sheffield City-Region.

**Politics of Poverty and Uneven Development in the Sheffield City-Region**

*Unemployment, Worklessness and Poverty in the Sheffield City-Region*

Between 1981 and the mid-1990s thousands of jobs were lost in the Sheffield/South Yorkshire economy—those in employment declined by a staggering 12.4% between 1981 and 1991 and a further 5.4% between 1991 and 1996 (Dabinett 2004). Furthermore, during this period employment replacement occurred but tended to be based in retail, hotels and construction. In stark contrast to the era of steel and manufacturing—with high-paid, high-skilled, jobs-for-life—new labour market opportunities have invariably been precarious and based on part-time, low paid, insecure contracts. And during the past 20 years employment growth has not necessarily been accompanied by a relative increase in prosperity. The mid-term review of the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme, for instance, stated that

> "while GDP has increased in South Yorkshire and now stands at 76.03% of the EU average, the gap between the sub-region and the UK as a whole has barely altered. 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/ Sheffield Hallam University 2003: 17).

The jobs or employment gap, which was identified as a central problem in the South Yorkshire submission for Objective 1 status in 1999, has been highlighted more recently in the Sheffield draft Employment Strategy prepared by the influential labour market think-tank the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (2005: 19). In this it is suggested that,

> "One of the key Public Service Agreements (PSAs) for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is to narrow the gap between the UK employment rate and those local authorities with low employment rates. The DWP report 'Full Employment in every Region' identified Sheffield as requiring 13,000 more local people to be in employment to reach the UK average. Our figures show 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. Sheffield would need to assist an additional 3,300 people into employment per annum over the next five years in order to meet this target".

The CESI Report states that there are 83,000 people 'outside the labour market' as they are claiming Incapacity Benefit or income support, or not claiming at all with a total of nearly 100,000 people within the CR claiming IB (South Yorkshire Partnership 2006b). The reasons for an increase in incapacity benefit claims relates to the nature of the labour market. During the 1970s when skilled men were out of work, a lower proportion withdrew from the labour force. When the labour market became more competitive, with rising unemployment and less unskilled jobs being created, this group found that they could get higher benefits by claiming invalidity benefits (IB). Transfer to IB was officially sanctioned by the Employment Service at that time, as a strategy for reducing the claimant count and, therefore, viewed as a form of hidden or disguised unemployment (compare King 1995, Webster 2006). Today inactivity is four times higher than in the 1970s and reflects quite dramatic changes in the nature of demand for certain types of skills and the type of jobs being created (see Beatty et al 2002). As Table 1 shows there are significant numbers of

claimants in the CR with the majority who are what can be termed 'long term unemployed'.

*** Table 1 here ***

Whilst there seems to be some consensus that worklessness and 'dependency' upon long term benefits is a cause of poverty, there are fewer acceptances from official Government channels about the connection between level of benefits (what people actually receive in cash) and poverty. Yet Table 1 provides some indication of the numbers (and families) that are likely or vulnerable to experiencing financial problems. As the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) state:

> "Despite the Government's concern about the generosity of benefits acting as a deterrent to work, high levels of poverty among disabled people indicate that they do not provide an adequate financial safety net. It is hardly surprising that IB (currently a meagre £78.50 a week) is failing to safeguard disabled people from living in poverty. Although it is an 'earnings' replacement benefit, rates are between 16 per cent and 30 per cent of average earnings. While the long term rate of IB is more generous than JSA (Job Seekers Allowance), this is an indication of the inadequacies of JSA, not the generosity of IB" (Preston 2006: 101).

A Welfare Rights Worker in the Sheffield City-Region pointed out that claimants received Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) benefit increases of 55 pence a week in April 2005 giving a total of £56.20 per week.

> "The figures show the stark reality for people living on JSA. Far from the popular myth that unemployed people are living the high life they are now £30.30 pence worse off than if benefits had increased with average earnings (Interview, Welfare Rights Worker, 2006).

A survey of poverty in an inner city area of Sheffield revealed the number of households relying on very low incomes. As one Neighbourhood Worker observed:

> "We found that in the sample household survey 16% of households had incomes below £5,200 and 48% below £10,400. Furthermore of those on less than £10,400 28% are in owner occupation so you could say that low income owner occupation is a crucial issue, particularly in relation to how they manage housing costs" (Interview, Neighbourhood Worker, 2006).

However, an increasing component of poverty relates also to low paid employment, which has become a more prominent feature of employment restructuring in old industrial regions, such as Sheffield, in recent years. We now turn to examine this.

*Low Pay and Poor Work in the Sheffield City-Region*

Low pay and poor work are closely connected; people in low paid employment (particularly in part time work) tend not to have access to training and other 'benefits' such as trade union representation, pension schemes, and sick pay and the reality is that there are limited opportunities of upskilling and career/employment progression as routes out of low pay (McGovern et al 2004). Using the low pay threshold within the £6-£7 range as defined by Howarth and Kenway (2004) across Britain's city-regions, there are some 6.5 to 7.5 million UK workers in the low paid bracket. The largest single sector where low paid jobs exist is the retail and wholesale trade, although there are significant numbers in the public sector. In terms of the proportion of jobs in low paid employment, the hospitality industry (i.e. hotels and restaurants) has half of its employees in low paid employment.

South Yorkshire still lags behind the national average in relation to wages and many new jobs created within the region tend to be low paid (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). Using the New Earnings Survey (NES) Yeandle et al (2004) report a £250 a week threshold income. From the above discussion, the low pay bracket could be

considered in the range £250-£350 for full time employment. At £7 per hour this would equate to around 30% of men in full time employment within the Sheffield economy. These tables also reveal the extent of job polarisation as a feature of employment restructuring, with significant gaps occurring between the top and bottom 10% earners[4].

***Insert Table 2.1 and 2.2 here***

Part time jobs are a major feature of employment growth during the 1990s and beyond. As Table 3 shows, over 12% of total employment in Sheffield comprises part time work with a major proportion of these jobs performed by women.

***Insert Table 3 here ***

On a related theme, vacancy data is often used to underscore labour market health and vitality. CESI undertook a survey of Jobcentre vacancies and found that a vast majority involved Elementary and Sales and Customer Services Occupations, which are traditionally low paid (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion 2005: 43). Although some of the higher paid jobs are advertised in other agencies and through the media, these findings do reflect some observed patterns of labour market development in Sheffield.

Employment restructuring has reinforced occupational segregation, as women are concentrated in particular sectors and types of employment. Women's vulnerability to

[4] For a wider analysis of the UK labour market on this issue, see Green and Owen (2006).

low pay and poverty in Sheffield has been documented in recent research (Sheffield City Council 2003; Etherington 2005a and 2005b) as being related to care and family responsibilities, combined with the lack of and high cost of child care provision. These barriers affect career choices and earnings for women. The gendered nature of low pay in Sheffield is largely a result of women taking up part time employment as the only route into the labour market.

The picture becomes more complicated when analysing work and pay by ethnicity. For example, certain BME groups have a propensity to be concentrated in economic sectors where low pay is prevalent. In South Yorkshire, more than half of the Chinese and Bangladeshi men work in the Transport, Hotels and Restaurants sectors. Public sector employment, where many new jobs tend to be part time and low paid, has drawn in large numbers of BME groups including over 50% of Irish, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi women who work in Public Administration, Education and Health. Also significant numbers of men from Bangladesh and Pakistan are in part time employment (28% and 17% respectively) compared with 6% for White British males (Yeandle 2004: 25-28).

An important consideration of how poverty and low paid work are linked relates to the fact that many people who move into 'entry level' jobs carry debts with them (see Fletcher 2007). As one individual commented:

> "I became poorer by going back to work. I took a six month contract; when it finished, it took a year to sort out my benefits, leading to rent and council tax arrears and a court appearance. I lost my right to free school meals" (Participant in 'Every Child Matters' event, 2006)[5].

[5]The Every Child Matters Event was organised by the End Child Poverty Coalition, held in Sheffield in April 2006 (see End Child Poverty 2006). This voiced experiences of, exposed

Another welfare rights worker pointed out that there are many people who do not claim Working Tax Credits and that the extra income obtained by moving into employment (even though some people are not necessarily financially better off) can be offset by childcare costs.

> "In spite of the subsidies child care costs are too high for many one parent families and families on low incomes. In fact the quality and quantity of childcare provision in poorer communities is a lot to be desired. Provision is fragmented but it is not just cost – in some areas accessing child care can be extremely difficult" (Interview, Welfare Rights Worker, 2006).

*Training and Upskilling*

A high proportion of adults in South Yorkshire possess poor basic skills and there are low levels of attainment in NVQ level 2 and 3. The CESI report noted above found that a high percentage of young people entering the New Deal programmes lacked NVQ qualifications. Combined with a lack of employment experience, their chances in the labour market are extremely limited (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion 2005: 24).

This is underlined by the trend towards a high proportion of young people reaching compulsory school leaving age without Level 2 skills, which are required to prepare them for the labour market. For South Yorkshire this is 55% and 60% for those attaining Level 2 Skills by the age of 19 years (Table 4). Geographies of qualification attainment are illustrated in Table 4, with South Yorkshire being 10% under the national average.

*** Table 4 ***

challenges for, and also suggested solutions around ending child poverty in Sheffield and the UK more broadly. Transcripts of the event have been made available for this research.

The predominance of low skills is illustrated by Table 5, where there is a high rate of people in the labour market with no qualifications. However, the nature and value of NVQs as a vocational qualification that facilitates further progression in the labour market is questionable. This is because NVQs tend to replicate labour market weaknesses due to their focus on in-work behaviour and the fact they tend to be employer-led in terms of their design, delivery, and 'regulation'. The implications of this are that future skill needs and requirements of particular employees are not built into the NVQ system (Grugulis 2003). Similar arguments hold for standards and accreditations systems for firms, such as Investors in People, which do not possess any levers to significantly influence or regulate rogue employer behaviour (Hoque 2003).

*** Table 5 ***

People classed as economically inactive are particularly vulnerable in the labour market because most can be classed as unskilled—with 65% possessing no qualifications whatsoever (South Yorkshire Partnership 2006: 92). Etherington (2005b), based on earlier research on the South Yorkshire economy by EKOS (2002), highlighted the divergence in those receiving training with only a small proportion of those in lower status occupations receiving on-the-job training compared with managerial and professional occupations. Updated analysis for the South Yorkshire Partnership suggests that South Yorkshire is above the national average in terms of employer funded training—58% between 2004 and 2005. This is figure is based on a relatively small sample but suggests that given the scale of the skills 'crisis' in the local economy this is an inadequate performance. This finding is perhaps

unsurprising but it has a major impact upon mobility in the labour market. Many policies relating to 'employability' are based on the basic assumption that work is a route out of social exclusion and that once in the labour market work will be the foundation for further progression and advancement. In the Sheffield City-Region such opportunities will of course arise, but for many and perhaps the majority, there are high chances of being 'trapped' in low paid employment (Fletcher 2007).

**The City Region and Economic Competitiveness: Reinforcing Social Exclusion?**

The Sheffield City-Region (and its various 'strategies'), as we have argued earlier, needs to be viewed within the wider political economy context of state restructuring. In the words of Jessop and his speculations on the future of the capitalist state:

> "The economic policy emphasis now falls on innovation and competitiveness, rather than on full employment and planning. Second, social policy is being subordinated to economic policy, so that labour markets become more flexible and downward pressure is placed on the social wage that is now considered as a cost of production rather than a means of distribution and social cohesion. In general the aim is to get people from welfare to work, rather than resort to allegedly unsustainable welfare expenditures, and, in addition, to create enterprising subjects and to overturn a culture of dependency. Third the importance of the national scale of policy making and implementation is being seriously challenged, as local, regional, and supranational levels of government and social partnership gain new powers. *This is reflected in the concern to create postnational 'solutions' to current economic, political, social and environmental problems*, rather than primarily relying upon national institutions and networks" (Jessop 2002b: 459-460, emphasis added).

The agenda under discussion could be seen an attempt to displace the economic management of cities to city-regional networked entrepreneurial governance. This sentiment is evident in UK state strategies:

> "To achieve the Government's economic and social objectives therefore, all cities must lift their economic performance through enhanced employment and

> productivity growth while seeking to promote economic and social inclusion. As cities are diverse and face different challenges, effective partnership and leadership at regional and local level, with enhanced freedoms and flexibilities to address local problems, will be important. As many economic challenges cut across administrative boundaries, greater collaboration between local authorities, and with regional agencies, will reap economic rewards" (HM Treasury et al 2006: 58).

As Jessop suggests though, balancing these objectives is invariably contradictory as this strategic focus underpins a more market and private-sector approach to economic regeneration and tends to downplay or ignore the connections between the economic and the social or even the potential unequal outcomes of policies (Jessop 2002a; see also Gough et al 2006: 25). Welfare-to-work programmes, as mentioned above, are instrumental in reinforcing labour market exclusion. For example, welfare-to-work policies and the New Deal specifically have mobilising effects on the 'reserve army of labour', making the labour market apparently more competitive, but in doing so place downward pressures on pay (Grover 2003). More broadly, as Gray (2004) argues in her analysis of welfare-to-work in Europe, the operation of the New Deal and 'activation' policies needs to be analysed as closely linked to labour market deregulation and reduction in trade union bargaining rights. Both these policies also contribute towards the reproduction of low paid labour markets, with a considerable proportion of unemployed people tending to go into low paid minimum wage employment. And although the 'work first' aspect of the welfare-to-work programmes have been understandably the focus of attention, there are subtle ways in which through Personal Advisor Counselling and work-focused interviews have played a vital role in adapting people to local labour markets and shaping their expectations thereafter.

Grounding all this in the Sheffield City-Region, Hoogvelt and France (2000) initially undertook a 'client' survey tracking the experiences of the unemployed involved and not involved (termed *the disengaged* in the New Deal programme). They found in their evaluation of the New Deal Pathfinder in Sheffield that the objectives of the New Deal were not only to make the participants 'employable' but also to adjust young peoples' expectations about career paths and employment routes. Many people, for example, found that service employment was the only type of work they could obtain and these aspirations seem also to be influenced by the Advisors. This finding accords with later research on the North East for Job CentrePlus (Dobbs et al 2003), which found through focus groups involving the unemployed, that expectations of a possible wage well above the minimum wage was frowned on by Advisors.

Another interesting finding from Hoogvelt and France's study is the attitudes of the disengaged. They found that many had previously worked in higher paid and skilled work than new entrants to the labour market, and considered that the New Deal could not offer them anything. In more recent research, Fletcher has explored these issues further in evaluating the Working Neighbourhoods Pilots, which are area-based regenerations experiments aimed at targeted concentrations of workless in 12 localities across Great Britain (one being the Manor Estate, Sheffield). Commenting on how active labour market policy is currently operating within the Sheffield City-Region, Fletcher suggests that

> "*…policy makers should be wary of placing undue emphasis on area-based approaches*. First, many people living in the pilot areas are not unemployed or economically inactive and most of those without work live outside such area. This is known as the 'ecological fallacy'. Second, *the underlying causes are primarily of a structural nature and are, therefore, external to the local communities where their effects are most acute*. This means that the Working Neighbourhoods Pilot, whatever its achievements, is incapable of challenging

> the root causes of worklessness. Moreover, in focusing on cultural explanations of unemployment it might contribute to the pathologisation of such problems" (Fletcher 2007: 79, emphasis added).

These sentiments could be seen to connect with critical new regionalist concerns expressed above on relations of power between different scales of the state and also questions around the restricted 'capacities to act' of localities placed at the periphery of prevailing accumulation strategies (especially Hudson 2006; Jones 2001). Fletcher's arguments are also evident through our fieldwork undertaken in 2005-2006, where a voluntary sector officer involved in the establishment of the Working Neighbourhood Pilot in Sheffield observed that in the household survey, most people who were economically inactive expressed views of not wanting to work because of their perceptions of the type of work they could obtain, and also not wanting to get involved with the New Deal. This was further echoed by the views of other community activists and voluntary sector workers, who point to their lack of confidence in welfare-to-work programmes delivering sustainable jobs and that participation in the New Deal is not a positive experience. The implications of this finding are potentially far reaching when considering other employment/non employment routes, which the disengaged will take, including the 'black' economy and casual employment.

Likewise, research on the New Deal for Lone Parents in Sheffield undertaken by Casebourne (2003) underlines some of the points made earlier about the gendered nature of low pay, but also illustrates the way policies can act to guide lone parents into jobs that do not pay them a living wage. Paid work alone, despite the introduction of minimum wages, is not enough to successfully lift all lone parents out of poverty, given the ongoing segmentation of labour markets (SCOOP Aid 2001). A

regeneration seminar held in January 2007 also highlighted, amongst other things, the uneven impacts of regeneration across gender divides and according to the Executive Director of Sheffield Council's Neighbourhoods and Community Care Directorate:

> "Issues of who holds the power are key here, as is the difference between sitting on a board and making a meaningful contribution … Today, we can start to think about how we can incorporate a gender aware approach into regeneration work across the city to achieve better outcomes for women and men we are working to benefit" (Sheffield City Council 2007: 5).

Despite this, current national-level changes to the welfare-to-work regime, as part of the Freud Review on 'options for the future of welfare to work', have a particular city-regional focus and necessity by virtue of the urban geographies of unemployment (see Green and Owen 2006). There are two significant changes to the governance of welfare-to-work strategies, which have important implications for the Sheffield City-Region. The first of these is the Pathways to Work pilots, which are being rolled out across South Yorkshire to engage those on incapacity benefit. Pathways to Work have been introduced in Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield in 2006. The programme is aimed at increasing the employment rate by supporting new entrants to Incapacity Benefit (IB) to return-to-work, whilst existing claimants can volunteer to join the programme. An important aspect of Pathways is the role of health services through the Condition Management Programme, which helps people manage their disability or health condition in the course of their participation in the various Pathways schemes. All this involves mandatory interviews, specialist personal advisors, and also return to work credits. Initial assessment of Pathways suggests that the Government is increasingly bringing more 'economically inactive' into work first based programmes. It has been noted that the system may raise false expectations, particularly when the evidence suggest that many people do not succeed in obtaining

jobs or that many jobs on offer are low paid, which reinforces those trends outlined above (Preston 2006).

Second, changes have occurred with respect to the management of welfare-to-work, namely its delivery and contracts therein. Although it is too early to assess privatisation trends and contracting out, it is possible to chart changes to Jobcentre Plus—the local state manifestation of the merged services for the unemployed and benefit claimants. Firstly, cuts have been exercised across the employment option of the New Deal, which were explained as a result of declining JSA claimants. This has had negative implications for those claiming benefits and those being able to be lifted into available work. Secondly, further cut to staffing have been put in place, comprising a shift in resources to more front line services. One local Advice Agency commented:

> "There is an issue about the lack of information reaching people and around the reduction in staff at the DWP, where things will get worse before they get better. There is also a massive issue around the Welfare Reform Bill. Government Departments do not talk to each other and they hide behind the Data Protection Act. The need to fill in multiple forms puts people off. As an Advice Centre, core funding is always an issue that we talk about, because we have more and more demands placed upon our time. We are well aware that we reach only a fraction of the people who need help in this city (Individual, Participant in 'Every Child Matters' Event, 2006).

The core element of Jobcentre Plus organisational changes involves a dislocation between benefit claimants and advice services because of the introduction of the Call Centre system (Customer Management System) where claimants have to use and pay for an 0845 number for the initial contact. According to Welfare Rights Workers there has been a reduction in the quality of service to claimants with delayed decisions, incorrect advice being common.

> "For many claimants even after the telephone process has been completed, there is a further delay before they are interviewed at the Jobcentre Plus office. Time intervals in excess of 8 weeks between initial contact and receiving benefit are very common" (Interview, Welfare Rights Worker, 2006).

Given also that benefit (or the threat of) sanctions are still common, combined with considerable short falls in rights services to people who are seeking representation this only serves to highlight the vulnerability and further impoverishment of benefit claimants. The Sheffield Welfare Action Network (SWAN) has voiced concerns over all these moves:

> "Just as privatisation of the NHS was once 'unthinkable' and so far out of mainstream political thinking and is no proceeding apace: now welfare reform is to undergo the same process. Policies that would have been fiercely resisted by opposition parties if carried out by the Thatcher Govt are now routinely passed by parliament. There would appear to be a consensus across the main political parties that drastic welfare reform is needed. Combined with the draconian Welfare Reform Bill its clear now that we are seeing the biggest structural changes in welfare since the 1940s; indeed, there are now clear similarities between the Freud Review proposals and President Clinton's seminal 1996 welfare reforms which have been such a disaster for the poor in the U.S." (Sheffield Welfare Action Network 2007: 1).

In short, within this intensifying welfare-to-work urban regime, it is very difficult to envisage if and how the South Yorkshire Partnership/Alliance Sub Regional Strategic Partnership (2005: 14) can provide the basis for developing knowledge and research on an internationally competitive scale; providing the skills required by an internationally competitive economy; and creating an environment to encourage investment and higher quality of life.

## Conclusion

> "In order to intervene effectively to improve sub-national economic performance and to improve the prospects of people in deprived areas, it is important to be clear about the causes of spatial disparities, the interaction of the characteristics of people and places, and the extent to which they are driven by market or government failures. To lift economic performance at sub-national levels, and to

> tackle spatial disparities, it will be necessary to tackle any market or government failures in the underlying drivers of productivity and growth which impact differently across places. Differential impacts from market or government failures may result from differences between places and may be exacerbated by concentrations of people with particular characteristics. However, tacking spatial differences by tackling market or government failures may support convergence in welfare between people with similar skills and levels of employability" (HM Treasury et al 2007: 20-21).

This paper has sought to undertake two connected lines of critique, the first being the UK Government's approach to economic competitiveness and social cohesion through city-regions, and the second being an engagement with new regionalist literatures in the social and political sciences. This has sought to be both a critique *and* constructive engagement. On the latter, we have specifically tried to take this forward by addressing the city-regions agenda advocated by Ward and Jones (2004; Jonas and Ward 2007a) on 'geographies of collective provision'. For these authors, an approach was deemed necessary to uncover how struggle, conflict, uneven development and inequalities were occurring in contemporary capitalism as a 'politics of space'.

This connects to the former and by focusing on the Sheffield City-Region we have attempted to develop this through links between the interventions of 'active' labour market policies and knowledge-based economy informed skills strategies, and their potential influences on the local labour market for producing inequalities and sustaining low paid employment. There is little evidence that upskilling to achieve upward mobility of the kind inferred in recent Government documentation on city-regions (Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; HM Treasury et al 2006, 2007) and in turn constructing the sustainable basis for a 'global city region' based on localised agglomeration (Scott 2001) occurs to any significant degree within the Sheffield City-Region labour market. We have argued that there is also a substantial skills gap to

accompany the employment gap within the Sheffield economy, which current strategies appear to be unable to plug.

Yes, the causes of the problem are deeply economic and supply-side initiatives can make a difference in the right context, but they are also deeply political; they relate to the shortcoming of the neoliberal model of city-regional competitiveness, its 'everyone's a winner' discourse (Bristow 2005), and multiple rounds of market failure, government failure, government-induced market failure, and market-induced government failure. The socio-spatial pathology approach being explicitly advocated by the HM Treasury quotation above—taken from the *Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration*—is probably considered to be the price worth paying to protect the 'golden goose' of London and the South East. The key to UK (and Sheffield) success in an expanding global economy will be the ability to innovate and apply technology, and control an increasingly intellectual property portfolio. This requires an economy able to produce, absorb, and reproduce highly skilled people, which policies in the Sheffield City-Region appear to be unable to provide in a sustainable manner. In these policy-relevant times, those interested in regional studies, and we include ourselves in this category, need to work hard to consider alternative policy scenarios, and we would encourage future research on the consequences of the scenarios outlined here for: the future of labour markets without a growing and sustainable stock of 'good' jobs; social exclusion geographies stemming from this; and those local people and place characteristics uttered above with respect to unevenly developing cultures of (un)employability.

Table 1: Baseline Data for Target Categories in South Yorkshire

| Group | Sheffield | Rotherham | Doncaster | Barnsley |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Incapacity Benefit (including DLA & IS)** | 23,400 residents, (8% of the working age population) | 15,150 residents (9.8% of the working age population) | 17,965 residents (10% of the working age population) | 18,500 residents (13.9% if the working age population) |
| **Lone parents claiming income support** | 6,880, or 2.3% of the city's working age population | 3,000, or 1.9% of the working age population | 4,190, or 2.4% of the working age population | 2,500, or 1.9% of the working age population |
| **Partners of benefit claimants** | 8,500, mainly women (10% of those adults who are outside of the labour market) | Not available | Not available | Not available |
| **BME communities** | Gap between the employment rate for white and all BME communities is 22% | Gap between the employment rate for white and all BME communities is 24.2% | Not available | Not available |
| **Disadvantaged wards** | 12 wards where the employment rate is significantly below the city average reflecting the geographical polarisation of the city | IB and SDA claim rates for Rotherham's disadvantaged wards far exceeds the borough average with the worst performing standing at 17.2% of the working age population. | Significant disparities within and between communities in Doncaster, the highest concentrations of IB claimants in some is twice the borough average. | 10 wards where claim rates exceed the local authority average. |

Source: Sheffield City Council (2006:6)

Table 2.1: Distribution of Weekly Earnings: Men in Full Time Employment

| Area | % Earnings Under | | | %10 Earned |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (£ Sterling) More than | £250 | £350 | £460 | Less than |
| Barnsley 668.90 | 17 | 40 | 69 | 220.50 |
| Doncaster 594.00 | 18 | 49 | 73 | 222.30 |
| Rotherham 642.80 | 12 | 43 | 68 | 230.90 |
| Sheffield 715.00 | 15 | 42 | 63 | 225.00 |
| South Yorkshire 656.60 | 15 | 43 | 67 | 225.30 |
| England 852.60 | 12 | 35 | 56 | 240.00 |

Source: Adapted from Yeandle et al (2004)

Table 2.2: Distribution of Weekly Earnings: Women in Full Time Employment

| Area | % Earnings Under | | | %10 Earned |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (£ Sterling) More than | £250 | £350 | £460 | Less than |
| Barnsley 577.80 | 12 | 40 | 68 | 182.20 |
| Doncaster 572.90 | 11 | 35 | 62 | 184.30 |
| Rotherham 590.90 | 12 | 43 | 71 | 182.30 |
| Sheffield 591.50 | 8 | 30 | 58 | 198.30 |
| South Yorkshire 656.60 | 10 | 35 | 62 | 191.20 |
| England 623.80 | 8 | 27 | 55 | 196.20 |

Source: Adapted from Yeandle et al (2004)

Table 3: Economic Activity/Inactivity in Sheffield

| | Total | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 374,148 | 185,734 | 188,414 |
| **Econ Active Total** | | 69.3% | 57.0% |
| Employee Pt Time | 12.4% | 3.7% | 21.0% |
| Employee Full time | 37.0% | 47.2% | 27.0% |
| Self Employed Pt Time with employees | 0.3 % | 0.3% | 0.4% |
| Self Employed Full Time with employees | 1.9% | 3.1% | 0.7% |
| Sel Employed Pt Time without employees | 1.1% | 1.1% | 1.0% |
| Self Employed Full Time without employees | 2.9% | 5.1% | 0.8% |
| Unemployed | 4.2% | 5.8% | 2.6% |
| Full Time Student | 3.3% | 3.1% | 3.4% |
| **Economically Inactive Total** | 36.9% | 30.7% | **43.0%** |
| Retired | 13.5% | 11.4% | 15.7% |
| Student | 8.1% | 8.5% | 7.7% |
| Looking After Home Family | 5.9% | 1.1% | 10.7% |
| Permanently sick/disabled | 6.2% | 6.9% | 5.4% |
| Other | 3.1% | 2.7% | 3.6% |

Source: Sheffield City Council 2001 Census Topic Reports

Table 4: Learners achieving NVQ Level 2 by age 19 in 2004 and 2005

| | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|
| England | 67% | 70% |
| Y& H | 64% | 67% |
| North Yorkshire | 85% | 87% |
| West Yorkshire | 60% | 64% |
| South Yorkshire | 58% | 60% |

Source: South Yorkshire Partnership (2006a: 86)

Table 5: Qualifications of people aged 16 -74 in 2001 in South Yorkshire

| | No Quals % | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4/5 | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| England | 29 | 16.6 | 19.4 | 8.3 | 19.9 | 6.9 |
| Y&H | 33 | 17.1 | 18.0 | 7.7 | 16.4 | 7.6 |
| South Yorkshire | 36 | 17.5 | 17.2 | 7.5 | 14.5 | 7.4 |
| Barnsley | 41 | 18.0 | 16.7 | 5.4 | 11.1 | 7.8 |
| Doncaster | 38 | 18.6 | 18.5 | 5.4 | 11.8 | 7.5 |
| Rotherham | 37 | 19.2 | 18.8 | 5.5 | 11.5 | 8.2 |
| Sheffield | 32 | 15.9 | 16.0 | 10.4 | 18.8 | 6.9 |
| | | | | | | |

Source: South Yorkshire Partnership (2006a: 91)

**Acknowledgements**

Earlier versions of this paper were pre Annual Conference (2006), Association of An ce (2007), and Institute for Advanced Studies Conference 'Regions and Regionalism in and Beyond Europe' (2007). The authors would like to thank participants at these, the anonymous references, and the editor of *Regional Studies* for insightful comments on the paper. David Etherington would like to thank the Open University for financial support and Martin Jones would like to acknowledge The Leverhulme Trust for research funding, through a Philip Leverhulme Prize. The usual disclaimers apply.

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