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**STATING THE PRODUCTION OF SCALES:
CENTRALLY ORCHESTRATED REGIONALISM,
REGIONALLY ORCHESTRATED CENTRALISM**

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ABSTRACT

Under the banner of the new regionalism, the past decade has witnessed a revival of academic and political interest in the region as a strategic site for economic activity and scale for socially integrating civil society. What remains unclear though are the 'actual mechanisms' that connect this new politics of economic development with transitions in the regulation and governance of contemporary capitalism and its territorial form. This article seeks further connection by distinguishing between the processes of *centrally orchestrated regionalism* and *regionally orchestrated centralism* in the production of regions. While sympathetic to the general tenor of the new regionalism, this article presents an account of England's unique new regionalist policy experiment to pose searching questions relating to the future direction of the new regionalism. Arguing that the new regionalism remains a fruitful avenue for unravelling the processes involved in the production of spatial scale(s), the article concludes that uncovering the politically-charged processes involved in the production of subnational space remains an urgent task for urban and regional scholars.

STATING THE PRODUCTION OF SCALES: CENTRALLY ORCHESTRATED REGIONALISM, REGIONALLY ORCHESTRATED CENTRALISM

“Functions...do not naturally reside at any one scale, but are variously institutionalized, defended, attacked, upscaled, and down-scaled in the course of political-economic struggles. Correspondingly, the present scalar location of a given regulatory process is neither natural nor inevitable, but instead reflects an outcome of past political conflicts and compromises.”

Peck (2002: 340)

1 Introduction

With the crisis in Atlantic Fordism prompting the demise of the Keynesian welfare state, the primacy afforded to the nation-state as the site and scale at which economic management is conducted, social welfare delivered, and political subjects are treated as national citizens has been challenged by the emergence and institutionalization of new state spaces (Brenner et al, 2003; Brenner, 2004). Bound up with this, the recognition that spatial scale and the successful coordination of economic activity are ‘deeply intertwined’ (Swyngedouw, 1997a) has provided the backdrop for geographers’ fascination with uncovering the ‘processes’ involved in the production of spatial scale(s) and associated geographies of rescaling (for overviews of the ‘scale debate’ see Herod and Wright, 2002; Sheppard and McMaster, 2004). The task at hand has been to

connect the new politics of economic development with transitions in the regulation and governance of contemporary capitalism and its territorial form (Jones, 2001).

While it was some time ago that Swyngedouw (1997b: 141) suggested that “scale (at whatever level) is not and can never be the starting point for sociospatial theory [but that] the kernel of the problem is theorizing and understanding ‘process’”, a new era in the ‘scale debate’ is emerging centred on three distinct yet related problematic in human geography: human geography with or without scaleⁱ (Jonas, 2006; Jones et al, 2007; Marston et al, 2005); state rescaling or beyond state rescaling (Brenner, 2004; Brenner et al, 2003; Mansfield, 2005); and, non-territorial/networked/relational or territorial/networked/relational conceptualisations of spatiality (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; *Geografiska Annaler*, 2004; Jones and MacLeod, 2004)? Binding them together is the continued quest to understand how sites and scales are produced, reproduced, even disappear. Here two forces have come to dominate the way we conceptualise the world around us.

For many commentators, globalization is a relentless force that increasingly defines the parameters of our daily lives (Dicken, 2007). In such accounts, the complex web of flows and processes spawned by globalising forces appear to have homogenised practice across an increasingly borderless world. Much less evident in the prevailing discourse but surely of equal importance and practical significance has been a new regionalism. Not to be viewed as the antithesis of globalisation, the new regionalism represents the

conceptual belief that while some flows and processes are becoming increasingly unrooted from the confines of place, a range of countervailing processes are increasingly grounded in nodes of intense economic and social activityⁱⁱ. The dominant discourse of its day, the new regionalism documented how the region came to represent a focal point for knowledge creation, learning, and innovation (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Cooke and Morgan, 1998; Florida, 1995; Scott, 1998; Storper, 1997) whilst also being deemed a crucial site for promoting a plural society centred on participatory democracy, active citizenship, and civic pride (Amin, 1999; Keating, 1998). Presenting the region as the focal point of post-Fordist political-economy, the new regionalist orthodoxy of the mid-to-late-1990s was particularly important given its currency amongst academics, policymakers and practitioners across North America, Western Europe and beyond (Hettne et al, 1999; Keating, 1998; Kipfer and Wirsig, 2004). Notwithstanding this, the levels of political belief shown by the United Kingdom Government in the new regionalism during this period were particularly noteworthy.

The establishment of a Scottish Parliament, Assemblies for Wales, Northern Ireland and London, and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) within the English regions were testament to the belief of the incoming Labour Government (1997) in the rhetoric of devolution and the new regionalism. But the politics does not stop there because for one territory the institutionalization of a new regionalist tier of subnational government remained incomplete. Left as the sole territory without additional elected political representation, attention soon focused on England's more modest form of devolution. It was, however, to be a

further five years before the Labour Government fired the starting gun on England's ascent to a fully democratised regional government – the proviso being that each region demonstrated a strong level of support in a regional referendum (Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions, 2002). Despite being held in the North East region, the *de facto* home of English regionalism, the first regional referenda held on 4 November 2004 witnessed the unanimous rejection of government proposals to create an Elected Regional Assembly (ERA)ⁱⁱⁱ. Confirmation swiftly followed that any move towards a fully democratic tier of regional governance in England was now firmly off the political agenda (Prescott, 2004).

Despite the publication of three major books on English regions (Hardill et al, 2006; Hazell, 2006; Sandford, 2005) the post-referendum years have been noteworthy for the surprising lack of critical debate^{iv}. What debate there has been has resulted in a policy-centred look at alternative institutional solutions for the territorial governance of England. Only the re-emergence of the city-region concept that has seen any sustained interest. What is perhaps most notable is that many conclude that despite the heavy blow dealt to the regional project, regions remain the only viable solution to the future territorial representation of England (Balls et al., 2006; Hazell, 2006). It is somewhat perplexing then that a “lamentable lack of theoretical and conceptual grounding” (Nash, 2002: 30) continues to forestall understandings of the processes involved in the production of the English regions^v, with little attempt made to understand how and why the region was successfully challenged in England. The revival of interest in the

region does however force us to ask searching questions about the politics of rescaling. In particular it focuses our attention on the strategic interplay of flows, connections, processes, networks, agencies and institutions in the production of regions in England as a “site-and-scale-in-the-process-of-becoming” (Jonas, 2006: 402). A key question arising from this is what is there to stop the region being successfully challenged again? It is argued that the answer lies in understanding the processes involved in the production of regions.

Following a discussion of new regionalist thinking, *centrally orchestrated regionalism* and *regionally orchestrated centralism* are identified as key processes in the production of regions. The former relates to a process that is not new, but to one which has resulted in a noose being placed around the neck of successive attempts to address England’s longstanding regional ‘problem’ (cf. Massey, 1979). By contrast the latter is a process which has become increasingly prominent in the struggles relating to the production of regions in England over the past decade. To develop these arguments the paper draws upon research conducted between 2004-2006 in England’s Northwest^{vi}. Interviews were conducted with forty-five national and regional stakeholders and, with the exception of two interviews, were all recorded and fully transcribed. Interviewees ranged from government ministers to local councillors, senior executives to mid-ranking and junior practitioners, and included representatives from private sector bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry. The analysis presented here is based on insights from these interviews with quotes used to capture the key points of concern expressed. Allowing centrally

orchestrated regionalism and regionally orchestrated centralism to be empirically demonstrated, the article demonstrates the continuing importance afforded to unravelling the processes involved in the production of spatial scale(s).

2 State Rescaling and the New Regionalism

With the nation-state appearing in decline, the emergence of a new regionalism catapulted the 'region' to the forefront of political-economic geography in the mid-1990s. Coming to represent the dynamic sociospatial form through which post-Fordist modes of capitalist accumulation were being mobilised and intensified, and inspired by Porterian notions of economic competitiveness, the rise of the regional state was so pronounced that it was said that we were living in a 'regional world' where regions were the fundamental building blocks for a globally interconnected capitalist state (Storper, 1997). Presented in this way, the region was seen as an apparent challenger to the primacy of the nation-state (Ohmae, 1995). A premature announcement perhaps, but what it highlighted was the forceful nature of the new regionalist campaign to emphasise the role of the 'region' and the 'regional scale' as the newly emergent sociospatial fix for capital accumulation after Fordism.

Following the publication of Storper's *The Regional World* (1997), Scott's *Regions and the World Economy* (1998), Keating's *New Regionalism in Western Europe* (1998), and Cooke and Morgan's *The Associational Economy* (1998), the new regionalism was the buzz word for political-economists across Western Europe and North America. Its architects were seen to be at the forefront of

research into deciphering the new politics of economic development with transitions in the regulation and governance of contemporary capitalism and its territorial configuration. With academics, political leaders, and practitioners soaking up lucid accounts of how regions such as Baden Württemberg, Emilia-Romagna and Silicon Valley were 'winning' in the post-Fordist era, the zenith of new regionalist inquiry was checked by a series of pertinent critiques (Lovering, 1999; Jones, 2001; MacLeod, 2001b). In the search for a new ontological fix for capitalist economies, akin to the nationally configured Keynesian welfare state of Atlantic Fordism, it was argued that the authority afforded to the region had run too far ahead of sustained rational theorisation and rigorous empirical testing. Highlighting a number of inherent fault lines within the new regionalism^{vii}, the assertion that regions were the replacement for a declining nation-state was revealed to be too simplistic. In these accounts, not only was the new regionalism identified as "a poor framework through which to grasp the real connections between the regionalisation of business and governance and the changing role of the state" (Lovering, 1999: 391) but "barring a few exceptions much new regionalist research had either disregarded the changing role of the state or implied that, amid the current round of globalisation-regionalisation, it is inevitably in terminal decline" (MacLeod, 2001a: 806). In sum, the new regionalism had swung the pendulum too far in emphasising, almost certainly imposing, the importance of the region as the site and scale for embedding the new institutions of governance after Fordism.

Warning that the new regionalist desire to impose the region as the strategic site for capital accumulation was “deeply problematic and quite inadequate”, claims that “the changing functional and territorial contours of the state – and its intricate connections to the globalization-regionalization dialectic – urgently require to be established as a definitive object of inquiry” (MacLeod, 2001a: 806) symbolised the emergence of a new tract of new regionalist research. Not designed to unravel the new regionalism completely, this new body of work acknowledged how the rise of the regional state was not necessarily or purposively at the expense of the state but a new form of ‘spatial selectivity’ by the state (Brenner, 2004; Brenner et al, 2003; Goodwin et al, 2005; Jones, 2001; Jones et al, 2004; MacLeod, 2001a; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999a, 1999b). As such this dimension of new regionalist research came to represent much more than just the geography of regions. More it was about understanding the changing territorial configuration of the state, and how the restlessness of the state in some ways mirrors that of capital in its search for the ‘perfect’ spatial fix. As a consequence, the geography of a region could not be fully explained through the adoption of a ‘thin’ political-economy approach, “most conspicuous in the failure to fully appreciate the critical role of the state in shaping the urban-regional fabric and a related weakness in examining the asymmetries of power” in the production of regions (MacLeod, 2001a: 1146). But just as the pendulum had swung too far in the direction of the region during the period of new regionalist orthodoxy, the danger was that this new wave of academic endeavour could easily swing the pendulum back too far in the direction of the state.

One way that this has been averted has been as a result of increasingly pluralised approaches to conceptualising the production of regions; ones that go beyond narrow political or economic constructions to consider the political, economic *and* cultural construction of regions (Paasi, 1986; MacLeod and Jones, 2001)^{viii}. In regional studies, this has been most clearly articulated by Jones and MacLeod (2004) in their distinction between the production of ‘regional spaces’ and ‘spaces of regionalism’: the former referring to the production of regional difference by *economic* processes; the latter to processes of *political* mobilization around notions of regional difference (e.g. cultural identity, citizenship). Articulating how the production of regions requires recognition of “*both* a political-economy of scale *and* a cultural construction of scale” Jones and MacLeod (2004: 448 original emphasis) question the haste with which academics appear inclined to jettison territorial and scalar approaches to the theory and practice of spatiality. Supported by their own research on England’s Southwest region, Jones and MacLeod call for “a retaining of territorially oriented readings of political economy and *when appropriate* their conjoining with non-territorial and/or relational socio-economic and political strategies” (2004: 448 emphasis added). In so doing they demonstrate how the production of regions remain an important lens through which to unravel the theory and practice of spatiality (Pike et al, 2007). So not only does this paper distinguish between processes of centrally orchestrated regionalism and regionally orchestrated centralism, it emphasises how territorially oriented political-economy perspectives remain an important tool

for uncovering the 'actual mechanisms' through which state power and authority are being re-scaled (Swyngedouw, 1996).

3 England's New Regional Policy: The Historical Politics of Centrally Orchestrated Regionalism

Though regionalists have long argued the case for decentralising powers away from London (Barlow Report, 1940; McCrone, 1969; Banks, 1971; Regional Policy Commission, 1996) the politics of the UK has been dominated by processes of centralisation. Arriving at the latter end of the twentieth century and buoyed by the popularity surrounding the new regionalism Blair's Labour Government promised a new approach. By giving the English regions and the people who live in them more power to determine their own future, the Labour Party promised to reverse the tide of centralisation and create a modern Britain fit for the twenty-first century (Labour Party, 1997). But despite the rhetoric Labour's decade of decentralisation has done little to reverse the trend of centralism (Morgan, 2002; Harrison, 2006b). Rather it is the latest in a long line of decentralisation policies which have been dominated, and as a result undermined, by centrally orchestrated regionalism^{ix}. A brief historiography of English regional policy demonstrates this clearly.

Constitutional politics in the UK prior to 1916 was dominated by the evolution of the Westminster Parliament in London from the focal point of a colonial empire to that of a national parliament. Strongly considered at the time was the offer of 'Home Rule for All'; namely that home rule would be offered to

Ireland, Scotland and Wales, while Westminster would become a federal parliament and England regionalised to avoid the domination that England would have within a federation. That a federal approach was never adopted is revealing not least because it reinforces the colonial relations between London and the English regions, but the failure to negotiate a constitutional settlement derived from a tension between 'centralised government – and civic regionalism' (Fawcett, 1919, quoted in Defries, 1927: 238). This, it could be said, is the first clear sign of centrally orchestrated regionalism in the development of an English regional policy. As a result, the subsequent period 1916-1944 was dominated by the problematisation of England within the context of Home Rule.

The inter-war years marked the creation of the first regional structures in England. Accentuated regional disparities not only stoked the flames of hostility towards London, but they forced the state to intervene in the regulation of food supplies and labour distribution by creating regional offices for a number of Government departments. Derived from the theory of 'spatial Keynesianism', the use of functional regions in the immediate post-war period saw regional policies emerge as variants of broader initiatives from an interventionist Keynesian state drawing its political support from the disproportionately high levels of unemployment blighting the UK's industrial regions. Continuing into the 1960s, Howard Wilson's Labour Government attempted to address the underlying socioeconomic problems in England through the establishment of Regional Economic Planning Boards (REPBs). Inspired by French 'indicative' planning, the REPBs represented a top-down interventionist approach to regional policy.

Wholly reliant upon central government, devoid of executive powers, and administered by civil servants working out of London, the REPBs epitomised centrally orchestrated regionalism in English regional policy.

Despite the reporting of the Kilbrandon Commission in 1973^x, and the publication of the Labour Party's *Alternative Regional Strategy* (Parliamentary Spokesman's Working Group, 1982), English regionalism was virtually silenced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government during the 1980s. Inheriting a stagnant economy, the 1980s was dominated by the accelerated centralisation of resources to preserve London's status as the *a priori* global city. The result was that while London and the South East continued to flourish (Allen et al, 1998; Peck and Tickell, 1992; 1995) a rapid acceleration in the decline of manufacturing heralded the collapse of regional economies in the UK periphery (Massey, 1984). By the time John Major became leader of the Conservative Party and *de facto* Prime Minister in 1990, the political fallout from a decade of centralisation had provoked new territorial politics at the local and regional levels. Facing widespread criticism that government investment was being mismanaged, Major's more accommodating form of neoliberal Conservatism saw the introduction of Government Offices for the Regions (GORs) in 1994. Designed to bring public administration and civil servants closer to the people who their decisions affected, the regional element to GOR activity was undermined by the deep suspicion held amongst regional stakeholders that GORs were deployed to act as the government's 'eyes and ears' in the regions, alert to murmurings of further discontent at the privileging of London and the South East (Musson et al,

2005). Today GORs are a cornerstone to a new regional policy. Yet they still struggle to avert these suspicions. Of particular note is how even in the words of the Labour Party's most committed regionalist, the benefits of GORs to central government prove definitive, while the benefits for the region remain merely suggestive:

“For [Central Government] Departments, there is a huge advantage in having their own people, people who understand the business of Government, nearer the front line and taking a view across the regional agenda. For local stakeholders, the Government Offices can promote and discuss Government's aims across a wide range of policies.”

John Prescott (quoted in Regional Coordination Unit, 2003: 3)

With GORs operational when Labour swept to power in 1997, the establishment of RDAs along with their indirectly-elected RAs^{xi} represented the centrepiece of plans to implement a new regionalist tier of governance in England^{xii}. However, the new institutional arrangements did not cast off concerns relating to the centrally orchestrated nature of regionalism in England. Noteworthy here was how key actors within the GOR network viewed the balance between centralisation and regionalisation under Blair's new regional policy:

“Before the RDAs were established, the GORs used to style themselves as the voice of Whitehall in the region, and the voice of the regions in Whitehall. I think that since the formation of the RDAs, and actually since the growth of the Regional Assembly, our role has become much more central government in the region rather than the region in central government.”

[Interview GOR Official]

For many regional stakeholders this reinforced their long held belief that GORs were a mechanism to facilitate central intervention rather than promote autonomous regional action. By way of contrast, and indicative of their new regionalist parentage, RDAs were to be ‘economic powerhouses’ in the vanguard of a competitiveness revolution, resolving England’s regional economic problems by increasing community participation, participatory democracy, and civic pride through networks of social capital (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions [DETR], 1997). But the promise of a new approach, of autonomous regional action, was to prove thinly-veiled with the century-old tradition of centrally orchestrated regionalism coming to the fore once more. As state-sponsored bodies RDAs had access to resources but could only apply these in ways sanctioned by, and within parameters established by, central government (cf. Peck, 1995). RDAs were forced to ‘work within the framework of national policies’ (DETR, 1999a: 2), ‘support and enhance national policies’ (DETR, 1999b: 3) and enable the ‘effective delivery of Government programmes’ (DETR,

1997: 1). So despite the rhetoric, centrally orchestrated regionalism ensured that RDAs added to a growing list of institutions whose appearance in the English regions was more a mechanism to facilitate central government intervention than to endorse autonomous regional action (Lynch, 1999; Webb and Collis, 2000). But recognising that centrally orchestrated regionalism was influential in the development of RDAs is not sufficient to explain the political-economy of RDAs. To do this we need to understand how centrally orchestrated regionalism affects the outcome of the devolutionary process.

Despite the many on-the-ground guises that devolution takes throughout the world, the rhetoric of devolution remains consistent in its suggestion that an economic and democratic dividend can be secured by devolving power away from the state. This was the basis upon which the orthodoxy surrounding the new regionalism was established, and the incentive for the Labour Government to embark upon its programme of devolution and constitutional change. But missing in each was acknowledgement of the critical role played by the state in enabling or restricting the devolutionary process, defining how it operates, even governing its outcomes. And herein lays the contested nature of devolution. As Rodríguez-Pose and Gill note in their analysis of global trends in devolution:

“[T]he interests of subnational and national governments tend to be at odds ... Although national governments would prefer, *ceteris paribus*, to devolve responsibilities (authority) to their regional or state governments with as few accompanying resources as possible, the subnational

governments would prefer the opposite case. The balance between these extremes will depend upon the relative strength, or, in political terms, legitimacy, of the two tiers of government.”

Rodríguez-Pose and Gill (2003: 334)

Acknowledging the critical role of the state in the devolutionary process demonstrates how the complexity of the devolution process derives from the interest conflicts of the actors involved at a national and regional level (cf. Peck, 2002). Seen clearly in repeated attempts to devolve power to the English regions, centrally orchestrated regionalism results when the interest conflicts between actors at a national and regional level is weighted in favour of national level government. As such the relative success of devolution, measured first and foremost in an economic dividend and second in a democratic dividend, can be “significantly compromised in situations where the central government is driving, defining and propagating devolutionary initiatives” (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2005: 416).

To lesser or greater extent depending upon the extent of the imbalance, centrally orchestrated regionalism can diminish, even eradicate, the potential dividend of devolution. There are a number of reasons for this. First, overcentralization can lead to the devolution of responsibility without resource. In England, for instance, centrally orchestrated regionalism ensured that RDAs were established with “miniscule budgets, modest powers and a raft of responsibilities” (Morgan, 2002: 802). Second, constraints imposed on the

regional tier of government can ensure that by the time national government requirements have been administered^{xiii} there is little or no resource available to enable policies to be locally matched and the likelihood of innovation and experimentation is seriously compromised – both key to securing the economic dividend of devolution. All in all centrally orchestrated regionalism can seriously undermine the possible economic benefits of devolution. More than this it may ultimately undermine the possible political benefits of devolution as the regional tier of government is simply seen as another layer of bureaucracy. It is here that we pick up the story of English regional policy once more.

Having added to a burgeoning democratic deficit, and responding to the levels of apathy towards the lack of authority afforded to RDAs and indirectly-elected RAs, the UK Government confirmed that they were to offer the English regions the opportunity for directly-elected political representation in the form of ERAs. Proposals to allow each region “to truly take control of its own destiny and enable it to move up the economic and social prosperity ladder”, whilst being able “to reduce bureaucracy” and “provide a new regional level of public scrutiny and democratic accountability” (Prescott, quoted in DTLR, 2002: 7) were seen as part two of the new regionalist orthodoxy in action (cf. Jones, 2001). Again it is worth reflecting on the politics surrounding this major event in the history of English regional policy.

A region with relatively high levels of civic regionalism, the North East was viewed by government officials as a ‘safe bet’ to locate the first referendum^{xiv}. In part this was due to the unique position that the region occupied following the

debates on devolution in the 1970s. With the potential for a powerful government to be created in Edinburgh through the Scotland Bill of 1978 seen as a real threat to the region, regionalism has proved to be a strong part of the North East's make-up ever since (Tomaney, 1999). Fearing that a more powerful neighbour would deflect investment away from the North East, the regions' Labour MPs promoted the need for an amendment to the Bill stipulating that a Scottish Assembly had to secure the support of 40% of eligible votes in a referendum – a figure which was not achieved. Labour MPs in the North East region were thus partly responsible for Scotland having to wait a further twenty years for devolution. Having taken this stance, and with an increasing sense of annexation under Thatcherism during the 1980s, the North East region became the *de facto* home of the English regional campaign (Benneworth and Tomaney, 2002; Tomaney, 2001). All in all the power of the new regionalist message and the levels of regional interest in the North East should have made the region the 'safe bet' that government officials clearly assumed that it would be. But once more the politics and power of centrally orchestrated regionalism overwhelmed proposals for enabling autonomous regional action.

Cautioning its own government against what it saw as a failure to equip ERAs with the tools necessary to complete the task at hand, the Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers' Committee on Housing, Local Government and Regions (2005: 3)^{xv} stated how:

“The scope of the powers and responsibilities which the Government was prepared to give to Assemblies was disappointing and would limit their effectiveness. The general power proposed for elected assemblies needed to be more explicit with more specific statements of their functions. This would provide greater clarity, and could also fire the imagination of the general public and potential assembly candidates.”

The committee also believed that “in many key areas where power is devolved, central government would have remained the dominant party in the relationship with elected regional assemblies” (*ibid.*, 20). Drawing a clear parallel with Rodríguez-Pose and Gill’s (2003) axiom on devolution, centrally orchestrated regionalism ensured that what the regionalist hand of government was to devolve the centralist hand was going to drag back to the centre. As this became more apparent in the months leading up to the North East referendum, and given the perceived affect of centrally orchestrated regionalism on the dividend of devolution, “the problems rather than the potential came to be at the forefront of voters’ minds” (Rallings and Thrasher, 2006: 935).

In many ways this is a well rehearsed argument that goes far beyond England, with regions eager to acquire new authority and a resolute nation-state determined not to cede power (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2003). But the effect that this has on other scalar relationships remains narrowly constructed around whether the state, having successfully fought off the regional campaign for more powers to be devolved from the state through centrally orchestrated regionalism,

will sanction the upscaling of authority and resource from the local state to generate meaningful economic prosperity. In these accounts and others, RDAs are nearly always treated as individual regional agencies or as a national collective. To date little or no attempt has been made to explore the ‘actual mechanisms’ (Swyngedouw, 1996) through which functions are variously attacked, defended, upscaled and downscaled through the RDA themselves. It is to this that the paper now turns through a detailed focus on one English RDA in particular – the Northwest Development Agency.

4 England’s Northwest: A Window on Regionally Orchestrated Centralism

England’s Northwest has been an important lens through which to observe the processes involved in the production of regions over recent years (Burch and Holliday, 1993; Deas, 2006; Deas and Ward, 2000; Jones and MacLeod, 2002; Tickell et al, 1995). This is in large part a reflection on the sheer size and diversity of the region. Comprising five subregions, Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Merseyside, England’s Northwest has a population of 7 million and an economy grossing £106 billion per annum. To put this into perspective, the regions’ population not only outstrips that of Scotland and Wales (5.3 and 3 million respectively) but it also exceeds that of a number of European states – Denmark (5.5 million), Finland (5.3 million), Norway (4.5 million) and the Republic of Ireland (4 million). Second only to London and the South East in England, a turnover of £106 billion is higher than fourteen European Union

countries (including Denmark and Finland), and leaves the regions' economy as the twelfth largest in Europe (NWDA, 2006). As one commentator recently noted, "the North West region is a country within a country such is its economic clout, its educational and research base, the strength and innovation of its industries and the beauty of its countryside" (Watts, 2007: no pagination)^{xvi}. But this only tells one half of the story.

A legacy of the regions industrial past, and in particular the deindustrialisation of the North West economy following the collapse of Atlantic Fordism, have ensured that despite experiencing an economic upturn, on key indicators the region continues to underperform. For over a decade the region's Gross Value Added per head has stood 11% lower than the England average. Of the fifty most deprived districts listed in the *2007 English Indices of Deprivation*, the North West region contained eighteen (36%) (Communities and Local Government, 2007). Of the twenty-five most deprived districts fourteen are to be found in the region (56%), while the five most deprived districts (Liverpool, Knowsley, Blackpool, Manchester and Burnley) are all located in the North West. These are alarming figures for a region that during the nineteenth century exhibited all the localised synergy of entrepreneurship, adventure and technological advancement that is so cherished in today's quicksilver global economy.

Forced into a rapid restructuring of its economic activity during the 1980s, the North West region witnessed renewed political lobbying for an increased hand in managing its own destiny (Burch and Holliday, 1993). With local attempts

to break the spiral of (economic) decline exhausted, the initial signs of a regional lobby began to emerge at the beginning of the 1990s when a number of influential actors realised that adopting an insular and parochial outlook was proving to be a major hindrance to the North West's economic recovery. This coalition of instrumental actors came together in 1992 to formally create the North West Regional Association, a regionally representative body charged with formulating a strategic framework for enabling the region's economic recovery (NWRA, 1993). Emblematic of a newly emergent local and regional politics, the NWRA enabled the region to present a coherent approach to economic development and to exert what little influence they could on the centralisers in the Conservative Government in London. In contrast to previous regional institutions, the uniqueness of the NWRA was that it was created in the region, by the region, for the region^{xvii}. An emerging and increasingly formalised regional lobby was one reason that lay behind the decision to establish GORs in the English regions.

If the creation of Government Office North West (GONW) offered a quasi-constitutional settlement, the establishment of the NWDA in 1999 signalled the arrival of new regionalist inspired political praxis to England's Northwest. Dripping with the new regionalist slogans of 'raising economic competitiveness', 'driving forward regeneration' and 'accelerating growth', the NWDA promised a 'regional renaissance' (NWDA, 1999). Responsible for preparing the North West's Regional Economic Strategy (RES) – an ambitious and visionary document that sets out the spatial and thematic priorities for promoting economic development

in the region till 2020 (NWDA, 1999)^{xviii} – the NWDA is the largest funded RDA nationally with a budget of £477.9 million (2007-08). Initially this sounds promising, but a legacy of centrally orchestrated regionalism in England ensured that the NWDA's budget pales into insignificance when compared with that of other UK devolved territories where the legitimacy of the regional tier of government is much stronger – Scotland's new parliament building alone cost £431 million. Further compounded by the complex nature of the North West's territorial composition and the fragmented nature of its regional polity (Burch and Holliday, 1993; Giordano, 2002; Jones and MacLeod, 2002; Tickell et al, 1995) this raised questions as to the ability of the NWDA to govern a region as large and diverse as the North West, let alone to build sufficient capacity to manage expectation and deliver a regional renaissance. But to understand this complexity we must first understand how the NWDA operates, and more specifically, how functions are variously attacked, defended, upscaled and downscaled through the RDA itself.

At the outset the NWDA was no different to the other English RDAs in creating a two-tier corporate governance structure, establishing an institutional presence both regionally and subregionally. At the centre of NWDA activity is Renaissance House in Warrington. Home to the NWDA's Board, Executive Management Team, and Policy Directorates, Renaissance House is the regional headquarters of the NWDA. The control centre for all aspects of the NWDA's activity in the region, Renaissance House is the critical interface for negotiating the economic future of the region with government ministers, political leaders,

civil servants and policymakers in London. Be it as strategy-maker, decision-maker, negotiator, or coordinator, Renaissance House is the beating heart of regional economic development in the North West.

Below this, the NWDA established an institutional presence, in the form of Area Offices, in each of the five subregions. Each Area Office was designed to represent the interface between the strategic decision-making hub of the agency (Renaissance House), key stakeholders, and local delivery partners. Without sufficient resource to be a strong delivery agent themselves – a legacy of centrally orchestrated regionalism – the interface with local delivery partners through their Area Office's was deemed fundamental to ensuring that that the NWDA had the capacity to deliver programmes in support of the RES and to go some way to delivering a regional renaissance. Working in and through their Area Offices, the NWDA were, to lesser or greater extent, forced to adopt a much stronger metagovernance role in the region – as *coordinators of coordination* – constantly negotiating with local and regional partners, both public and private, to ensure that what partners were delivering on the ground complements and delivers against the objectives set out in the RES (cf. Whitehead, 2003).

Operating with its own two-tier decentralised governance structure means that the NWDA had, in principle at least, created the institutional capacity for further devolving state power from the region to each of the subregions. This suggests that the principle of drilling down policy implementation and decision-making to the region would continue to filter down to the local level – and by design enable local stakeholders to engage and feed into regional decision-

making through the upscaling of local interests. But just as centrally orchestrated regionalism has ensured that the new regionalist rhetoric and the principles of devolution are not implemented nationally without a contest between regions and the state, the experience of the NWDA over the past decade suggests that another process, *regionally orchestrated centralism*, has developed as a result of the contest between the regional and subregional tiers of government in the North West.

As the years have passed the NWDA have grown into their role as coordinator and negotiator of the region's economic future, successfully embedding the agency within the complex web of governance structures operating in and through the region. But the past ten years have not been without their difficulties. From the outset the NWDA were to govern a region whose boundaries were designed for the political and administrative convenience of government officials in the 1940s, rather than from any historical or cultural inclinations^{xix}. Not unique in this regard (each English RDA faces the same problem) the North West suffers more than most because not only is the population and economy of the region comparable with that of some European states, but remarkably, just one of the five subregions, Greater Manchester, has a population equitable with that of the entire North East region of England, while the geographical area of another subregion, Cumbria, is also comparable. Put simply, if the North West is a 'country within a country' (Watts, 2007) then some of its subregions are 'regions within a region'. To create a regional blueprint for economic development, co-ordinate corporate activity, and establish the agency

in a region of such size and diversity was clearly going to be a challenging agenda for the NWDA.

When the NWDA was established in 1999 it had three immediate tasks: set up the agency, produce the RES, and prioritise their regional spend. Task one was completed with minimal discomfort^{xx}. Tasks two and three, however, began to present early signs of regionally orchestrated centralism penetrating the agency. Though high-levels of consultation were undertaken to produce the first RES, the political pressures imposed by national government to get the agency operational and the NWDAs desire to demonstrate its ability to provide leadership in the region ensured that a very strong lead was provided by the executive arm of the agency. Recognising the narrow parameters within which the NWDA could operate stakeholders from across the region accepted the authority granted to the Executive team at Renaissance House to provide such a strong lead in the production of the first RES (NWDA, 1999). The result was a strategy that could not be faulted for its aspiration and vision, but reading more like a compilation of ideas than a unifying plan, the synergy that could result from such an arrangement was lost. As one regional commentator noted:

“In its infancy [the NWDA] started off wanting to be all things to everyone. I think it’s a bit like when kid’s start school and they want to be friends with everyone in the class. I think that the NWDA were like that. They wanted to be friends with everyone.”

[Interview with North West Business Sector Representative]

Not alone in this respect, the North West was one of many regions to produce a strategy high on aspiration and vision but low on regional priorities (Benneworth, 1999) – one of a number of outcomes which resulted from centrally orchestrated regionalism. But for the North West, its sheer size and diversity ensured that the knock-on effects of trying to be ‘all things to all people’ snowballed. Producing such a wide-ranging strategy not only raised expectation amongst practitioners that their project would be deemed beneficial to regional development, given that any initiative could be cross-referenced with a priority outline in the RES, but it left the NWDA overwhelmed with project proposals none of which failed to get past the initial stages of the appraisal system. This stretched the NWDA’s management and staffing structures, placed a vast burden on its limited budgetary resources, and stoked the already high-levels of expectation amongst local partners that their project would receive financial support from the agency. This can be seen in the mindset adopted by each subregion in the early years of the NWDA:

“You have absolutely hit the nail right on the head. The mindset until two or three-years ago was, the NWDA has something like £420 million a year to shell out, there are five subregions, so we should all get £80 million...And if we are not getting £80 million, we are being badly done to, so we shout, we bang on at them, we moan and we whinge till we get it.”

[Interview with North West Subregional Political Leader]

For a new agency establishing itself in the region, it was natural, but ultimately unsustainable, for the NWDA to emphasise the expectation of economic rewards from devolution despite the reality of having little resource to deliver this. Somewhat inevitably it came to pass that in 2003 the NWDA faced a major funding crisis. Walking into an agency that had lost track of how much money they had committed to projects, the NWDA's new Chief Executive, Steven Broomhead, unearthed a serious budgetary deficit. Even graver than many expected, Broomhead and his staff were forced to sift through over 3000 files to discover that the NWDA's funding commitments for 2004 were already £200 million over and above their £430 million budget. For the next two years (2005-6) the NWDA were locked-in to a programme and their portfolio of activity was filled to the brim (and beyond) with projects that they had committed to fund. With little or no headroom to take on new activity the NWDA had no capacity (financially at least) to steer regional economic development.

With the new regionalist rhetoric and the principles of devolution premised on ensuring the necessary flexibility to shape economic development in accordance with local and regional (rather than national) priorities, for the NWDA to be locked into a fixed programme for three years provided a clear indication that the devolution of powers to the regional level was no guarantee of success. A difficult period for the NWDA ensued, with accusations of mismanagement prevalent:

“It is unbelievable. If a local authority behaved in this way it would be crucified. It’s an absolute shambles. They do not know what they have said yes to, or even what they have turned down.”

Quoted in Kelly and Gleeson (2004: no pagination)

The funding crisis which enveloped the NWDA was seen, first and foremost, to be the result of mismanagement. But there is another side to this story, one which has relevance to a much wider audience than those interested in the politics of a regional agency located in North West England. Take a step back and the NWDA’s funding crisis reflects the outcome of centrally orchestrated regionalism. Under resourced for the task at hand but striving to live up to its responsibility, it was not simply mismanagement of funding by the NWDA but the mismanagement of funding *as an outcome of* centrally orchestrated regionalism which set the conditions for the ensuing financial crisis to foster. Albeit an extreme example – the NWDA is the only English RDA to experience a crisis on this magnitude – it does begin to illustrate the knock-on effects of centrally orchestrated regionalism, and these effects do not stop here.

Today the NWDA are much more rigorous and challenging in the appraisal of projects. Where stakeholders got what they wanted (most notably finance) from the agency in the past, the NWDA are now less likely to support projects in this way. Financial support is now focused on a smaller number of what the agency term transformational or signature projects – projects or actions that the region must prioritise to really drive growth – which leaves the majority of

projects unfunded by the agency. Increasingly the NWDA contribute to projects by using their expertise, knowledge and influence over a range of government/non-government bodies to enable project leaders to explore, and more importantly, secure funding from other sources. This marked transformation in the role and outlook of the NWDA is expressed by one of its employees:

“It is forcing partners to be a bit cleverer in their own thinking. It is amazing that once they realise that no is a no, how many projects still happen with some innovative thinking around the issues. All of a sudden they have got the funding from elsewhere. If the project is sufficiently good and generates the outputs, there will be other funding partners who will step into our shoes. It is amazing how many private developers will take a chance and do the projects themselves...[He goes on to add]...There are a number of schemes that came to us, we said no, and all of a sudden you are passing them six-months later in the car and it is getting built. You speak to your partners in the local authority and you find out how it is being done. It is amazing!”

[Interview with NWDA Programme Manager]

Articulated clearly in the words of this NWDA employee, there was a real sense that the agency had made a breakthrough. Out of crisis had emerged hope for the new agency. Ironic in some senses but this was to be the positive outcome of centrally orchestrated regionalism in the North West. It eased the

pressure on their own limited resource, with the emphasis placed once more on the emergence of a metagovernance role for the NWDA in delivering regional economic development. The problem, however, was that regionally orchestrated centralism remained present and was continuing to determine the degree to which the NWDA could deliver the economic dividend of devolution.

Just as the Labour Government restricted the capacity for autonomous regional action in establishing RDAs, a legacy of the funding crisis was that the executive arm of the NWDA invoked their strong hand to restrict the capacity of their Area Office's to operate independently from Renaissance House. As two project managers noted, the disempowerment of the Area Office's rendered them largely ineffectual:

“To be frank, I have more contact with Warrington than I do with the Area Office. The Area Office is out on a limb because all their money that is currently going through them is really controlled through Warrington. I mean they can't even get a relatively small decision approved at Area Manager level, which must be very frustrating. There is expertise there but it is just not used.”

[Interview with Urban Project Manager]

“The fact that the NWDA happen to have a subregional office not very far from where we are now means absolutely nothing to us. Our first contact

is always through Warrington – it is where the money is, and it is where the people who actually make the decisions are at the end of the day.”

[Interview with Inward Investment Manager]

This is not without precedent. Despite little previous attention, a focus on the internal politics of the NWDA suggests that the politics of devolution not only extends beyond the centre-region axis, but moreover, this subregional politics of devolution often resembles, parallels, even mirrors that which has been so lucidly articulated in the devolution literature. Most notable in this latest scenario is that “the decentralization of ‘responsibilities’ without accompanying power, authority, autonomy or resources, offers perfect conditions for the fostering of spare, unproductive, or even wasteful governmental capacity” (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2005: 416).

The NWDA's response to their precarious financial position was to further centralise their activity. With the aim of taking a firmer control over the decision-making process, administering the public purse, and controlling even more activity centrally, the NWDA truncated many of their external linkages. Activity which had previously been conducted in the Area Office's was now to be conducted centrally. Serving to undermine Area Office's even more, the centralization of activity further weakened their position within the agency itself but also in their respective subregions. This was to leave the agency's Area Offices in the same position regionally as the NWDA found themselves nationally – isolated. This was confirmed by a high-ranking officer working in one of the

agency's Area Office's, who when asked whether their role and institutional capacity had increased over time (as the principles of devolution would suggest) explained how their autonomy was continuing to be constrained by regionally orchestrated centralism:

“Nine months ago I would have probably answered yes to that. One of the things that we have done in the last six months is to look at the Agency's funding commitments and what we have realised is that we have got more commitments than we thought we had. So what has happened in the last four or five months is that the flexibility and the delegated authority that Area Managers in the past had to approve funding decisions have been drawn back into the centre. So we have lost some flexibility in the way we operate as a result of that. All the decisions that we take now, and if we have got to approve an activity in the subregion, it has to be formalised at Renaissance House.”

[Interview with NWDA Area Office Official]

Not dissimilar to how centrally orchestrated regionalism demonstrates the capacity of the state to (dis)empower their regions, regionally orchestrated centralism demonstrates the capacity of the region (through agencies such as RDAs) to exercise its scalar power to (dis)empower their subregions. To deploy the language of Rodríguez-Pose and Gill (2003) once more, although the NWDA would prefer, *ceteris paribus*, to devolve responsibilities (authority) to their Area

Offices with as few accompanying resources as possible, the Area Offices would prefer the opposite case. In this regard regionally orchestrated centralism can be said to mirror centrally orchestrated regionalism. What remains indeterminate in all of this though is not that regionally orchestrated centralism exists, but to what degree its existence can be attributed to the effects of centrally orchestrated regionalism.

5 Concluding Comments

This paper has offered two key insights into the processes involved in the production of regions. 'Centrally orchestrated regionalism' derives from a well rehearsed debate about the rescaling of authority from nation-states to regions and the degree to which the central state are prepared to devolve power, while 'regionally orchestrated centralism' documents the rescaling of authority between the region and its subregions. Reflecting the importance of process-based approaches to scale (Swyngedouw, 1997a), both illustrate how particular material structures and processes have become (temporarily) fixed at or around the regional scale *and* how they are becoming unfixed at other scales (Jonas, 2006). Both also appear to stand in opposition to the principles of devolution, and in this regard, challenge the new regionalist rhetoric that regions can revitalise their own political-economic space(s). This it is argued has implications that have much wider relevance than simply those experienced in the English context.

Recognising that the recent devolutionary trend is not uniform (see Rodriguez-Pose and Gill, 2003), the degree to which centrally orchestrated regionalism is prevalent is clearly nationally specific, while within that national

context regionally orchestrated centralism will be regionally specific. All the same it is suggested that centrally orchestrated regionalism and regionally orchestrated centralism can be identified as important processes and/or outcomes of the global trend towards devolution. Moreover, the emphasis has been placed on exploring the processes and outcomes of the devolutionary trend that go beyond well-rehearsed arguments on the relationship between state and region. Indeed it may be necessary to consider regionally orchestrated centralism as being subregionally specific, for evidence suggests that the emergence of a new regionalism has coincided with the resurgence of another territorial form, that of the city.

The new city-regionalism has enjoyed a rapid rise to prominence, with city-regions heralded as “the basic motors of the global economy” and “territorial platforms for much of the post-Fordist economy” (Scott, 2001: 4). Given that regions have not been replaced, but joined by cities, this represents a subtle shift in the spatial focus of capitalism but one which has important connotations. First, the re-emergence of city-regions illustrates how particular material structures and processes are becoming fixed at or around the city-regional scale *and* how they are becoming unfixed at other scales (Jonas, 2006). Second, it has been noted elsewhere how the same lines of weakness which undermined the new regionalism are present in the new city-regionalism – implying that they have simply been rescaled or collapsed into the new focus on city-regions (Harrison, 2007). Third, while the emphasis on increasing flows and connectivity through cross-border networks under the new city-regionalism can be seen to represent a

move towards non-territorial, networked and relational conceptualisations of spatiality, the territorial structures of governance remain firmly in situ. And finally, with this increasing focus on cities *within* regions it could be that the effects of regionally orchestrated centralism are spatially uneven between subregions depending on the generic nature of each subregion (i.e. urban/rural) and the degree to which each subregion is pushing the city-region agenda. With interesting debates currently taking place on the region and city-region concepts in urban and regional studies (see *inter alia* Harding, 2007; Harrison, 2007; *IJURR*, 2007; *Regional Studies*, 2007; Jonas and Ward, 2007) it remains clear that uncovering the politically-charged processes involved in the production of subnational space remains an urgent task.

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ⁱ The notion of a 'human geography without scale' was first posited by Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones III and Keith Woodward in 2005 (Marston et al, 2005). Critiquing the dominant hierarchical conception of scale – the notion of a spatial scaffold running from the local to the global, up and down which social processes flow – and arguing that the perceived rigidities of this version of scale cannot be overcome simply by adding to or integrating it with horizontally networked theorizing, Marston et al propose to eliminate scale as a concept in human geography. Instead they propose a different ontology – a flat ontology – which so flattens scale as to render the concept unnecessary.

ⁱⁱ This paper deals solely with subnational forms of region. This is in contrast to the norm in academic traditions like international relations theory where the region is habitually deployed to define an area comprising more than one nation-state e.g. the Baltic Sea Region or the Middle East.

ⁱⁱⁱ 78% of voters voted against the government proposal. More detail on the politics behind the referendum is beyond the scope of this paper, but see Rallings and Thrasher (2006) and Tickell et al (2005).

^{iv} Most commentators were supporters (in principle) of ERAs and in their eyes “a vote of such magnitude against the idea was wholly unexpected” (Sandford, 2005: 1). Post-referendum many commentators have distanced themselves from the events of November 4, 2004.

^v There are a few exceptions to this, notably Allen et al (1998) and Jones and MacLeod (2004).

^{vi} Funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) this paper draws upon a three-research project entitled ‘Regions in focus: a new regionalist interpretation of England’s Northwest’ (Grant Number PTA-030-2002-01629).

^{vii} For an overview see Harrison (2006a).

^{viii} This plural approach to conceptualising space was also an underlying theme in the emergence of a debate on city-regions which took place in this journal. Arguing that the city-region concept has been constructed around a rather narrow set of empirical and theoretical issues relating to exchange, interspatial competition and globalisation, Jonas and Ward (2007) introduced an alternative approach to investigating and understanding geographies of city-regionalism, centred on struggles around social reproduction and political participation (see also, *IJURR*, 2007; Harding, 2007).

^{ix} The concept of ‘centrally orchestrated regionalism’ has echoes of Peck’s use of ‘centrally orchestrated localism’ to explain how local state-sponsored bodies in England were constrained by the controlling hand of central government under the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s (Peck, 1995).

^x Set up in response to the growing demands for home rule or full independence for Scotland and Wales, The Royal Commission on the Constitution (referred to as the Kilbrandon Commission) was a long-standing royal commission set up in the latter years of Harold Wilson’s Labour Government to examine the structures of the constitution in the United Kingdom. The final report formed the basis for proposals to afford Scotland and Wales devolutionary powers, but these were subsequently rejected in a referendum.

^{xi} Indirectly-elected Regional Assemblies were created by the Labour Government to shadow the RDAs. Charged with providing regional accountability, RAs have struggled to establish themselves within the regions. Under-resourced, unelected, and unclear of their role, RAs are

regarded as remarkably weak organisations and are due to be wound up in the next couple of years. Beyond the scope of this paper, the failure of RAs is yet another outcome and legacy of centrally orchestrated regionalism in England.

^{xii} It is worth recalling that “in England, Blair [did] not expect devolution to go beyond regional development agencies and joint boards of local councillors to oversee them” (Rentoul, 1996: 467).

^{xiii} In England this included an extensive array of targets which RDAs had to meet, and also their funding in those early years was received in departmental silos such that there was no flexibility to move money around (in order to meet local and regional needs) and had to be used to meet those department’s national targets.

^{xiv} The government’s choice of the North East as a ‘safe bet’ region was supported by a BBC opinion poll suggesting that 72% of the electorate supported the creation of an ERA (BBC, 2002).

^{xv} That it was an ODPM committee is important for within government it was the ODPM who were the driving-force behind proposals to create ERAs - not only was the department headed by John Prescott, the self-styled ‘governor of the regions’ but it housed the ‘Regional Assemblies’ division who had responsibility for drafting the proposals that were finally put to the people of the North East region.

^{xvi} This is an important point to reflect upon in that it strikes a chord, albeit in a slightly different way, with Peter Taylor’s fascinating insight into the North of England being England’s ‘foreign country within’ (Taylor, 1993). Writing at a time when much discussion centred on the legacy of Margaret Thatcher’s eleven-year tenure as Prime Minister, Taylor suggested that the real and authentic England was to be located in the south of England, with northern England – still reeling from deindustrialisation – seen as a contested place. That a region such as the North West is, fifteen years later, making headlines in such positive terms for being a ‘country within a country’ signals a remarkable transformation.

^{xvii} The rise of a regional lobby in the North West and the other English regions signalled the emergence of a new local and regional territorial politics. As noted in the previous section this new politics was one reason, alongside the emergence of discourses around a ‘Europe of the Regions’ and a criticism that government investment was being wasted through lack of

coordination and ineffectual decision making, which lay behind the Major Government's decision to establish GORs in 1994.

^{xviii} Two subsequent revisions to the RES have been published (NWDA, 2003, 2006).

^{xix} For Jones and MacLeod (2004: 434) this represented the "staggering lack of imagination" punctuating Labour's thinking over the territorial representation of England.

^{xx} There were only two clear points of contention. The first was the choice of location for the regional headquarters of the NWDA. With two large metropolitan centres in the region, choosing either Manchester or Liverpool was deemed too political, so a neutral location (equidistant from each city) was found in Warrington. The second point of contention surrounded the presence of the NWDA in Cumbria. The largest subregion by geographic area, Cumbria is also an extremely fragmented territory. To reflect this the NWDA decided to established two Area Office's in Cumbria.