CONFIGURING THE NEW 'REGIONAL WORLD': ON BEING CAUGHT BETWEEN TERRITORY AND NETWORKS

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Abstract   Recent years have witnessed a tremendous appeal in debating the relative decline in 'territorially embedded' conceptions of regions vis-à-vis the privileging of 'relational and unbounded' conceptions. In the most recent skirmishes, some scholars emphasise how it is not the privileging of one or other that is important, but recognising how it is increasingly different combinations of these elements that seem to be emerging in today's *new* 'regional world'. Here emphasis is being placed on a need to analyse how the different dimensions of socio-spatial relations (e.g. territory, place, network, scale) come together in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts to secure the overall coherence of capitalist, and other, social formations. The purpose of this paper is to make visible the politics of transformation in an 'actually existing region', North West England. In particular it seeks to uncover the role and strategies of individual and collective agents, organisations and institutions in orchestrating and steering regional economic development. For it is argued the unanswered question is not *which* sociospatial relations are dominant, emerging, or residual in any given space-time but understanding *how* and *why* they are dominant, emerging, or residual. The paper suggests the answer to this and other questions is to be found at the interface between emergent spatial strategies and inherited sociospatial configurations.

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"...advocates of a given turn are often tempted to focus on one dimension of spatial relations, neglecting the role of other forms of sociospatial organisation as presuppositions, arenas, and products of social action. Worse still, some scholars ontologically privilege a single dimension, presenting it as *the* essential feature of a (current or historical) sociospatial landscape. In most cases this overontologizes questions that are best resolved in more concrete-complex terms." (JESSOP et al., 2008, p. 391 original emphasis)

"...it could be argued that the relational and the (hierarchically scalar) territorial can be seen as both/and rather than either/or conceptions, that 'territorially embedded' and 'relational and unbounded' conceptions of regions are complementary alternatives, that actually existing regions are a product of a struggle and tension between territorializing and de-territorializing processes. Depending upon the circumstances and the specific situation of particular regions, policy and politics may be informed by a bounded territorial and hierarchical conception or by a relational conception that emphasizes a flat ontology of networked connections as the more appropriate perspective from which to view the region." (HUDSON, 2007, p. 1156)

INTRODUCTION: IN WHAT SENSE A *NEW* 'REGIONAL WORLD'?

A little over a decade ago the economic geographer, Michael Storper, famously declared that we are all now living in a 'regional world', where regions are the fundamental building blocks of a globally interconnected modern world (STORPER, 1997). Alongside this, the political geographer, John Agnew, argues that far from disappearing in globalization "regional economic and political differences seem, if anything, to be strengthening", implying that regions must be conceptualised as "central rather than merely derivative of nonspatial processes" (AGNEW, 2000, p. 101). Symptomatic of a much wider academic debate and policy-related discourse known as the 'new regionalism' (cf. KEATING, 1998; LOVERING, 1999; MACLEOD, 2001; HADJIMICHALIS, 2006; HARRISON, 2006) these headline-

grabbing claims are indicative of how regions were seen by many to be *the* pivotal sociospatial formation at the end of twentieth century (OHMAE, 1995; STORPER, 1997; SCOTT, 1998).

In large part this reflected a belief among economic geographers, institutional economists, and economic sociologists that regions are focal points for knowledge creation, learning and innovation – capitalism's new post-Fordist economic form (MORGAN, 1997; SCOTT, 1998; STORPER, 1997). Part also reflected a belief among political and social scientists that regions are important sites for fostering new postnational identities, increasing social cohesion, and encouraging new forms of social and political mobilisation (KEATING, 1998). And underpinning it all was a recognition that a select group of regional economies – the exemplars being California's Silicon Valley and the 'Four Motor Regions of Europe'; Baden-Wurttemberg (Germany), Catalonia (Spain), Lombardy (Italy) and Rhône-Alpes (France) – were bucking the trend of national economic decline to emerge as early 'winners' in post-Fordism.

Lauded for its pioneering research in deciphering the new politics of economic development with transitions in the regulation and governance of capitalism and its territorial configuration, the orthodoxy surrounding new regionalist thinking saw theory converge around the notion that regions represent the *only* scale through which order can be re-established following the collapse of the nationally configured Fordist-Keynesian institutional compromise. Nevertheless, the new regionalism is not without its critics (LOVERING, 1999; MACLEOD, 2001; HADJIMICHALIS, 2006; HARRISON, 2006). One among many lines of critique is the failure of its proponents to clearly define their object of study. Often assumed, rarely defined, critics describe how the region remains 'conceptually vague'

(LOVERING, 1999), an 'object of mystery' (HARRISON, 2006), and an 'enigmatic concept' (MACLEOD and JONES, 2007) in many new regionalist writings. Even in the work of the political scientist, Michael Keating, one of the most consistently insightful scholars on this aspect of the new regionalism, while it is acknowledged that regions take various forms (e.g. administrative, cultural, economic, governmental, historical) his and others' concern remains principally with regions as actual or potential subnational political units – be they administrative or governmental (KEATING, 1998). Taking this one stage further, PAINTER (2008) acknowledges how this is symptomatic of regional geographer's 'cartographic anxiety', i.e. a tendency to want to present regions as integrated and bounded territorial wholes despite recognition of how they take various forms, which rarely (if ever) correspond, or have congruent geographies.

In an increasingly mobile world characterised by all kinds of flows and networks this avowedly territorial and scalar logic is today challenged by those advocating a more radically 'relational' approach to the study of cities and regions (ALLEN and COCHRANE, 2007, 2011; ALLEN et al., 1998; AMIN, 2004; AMIN et al., 2003; MASSEY, 2007). Disturbing notions of regions as bounded territories, for these authors emerging sociospatial formations are not necessarily territorial-scalar but constituted through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition, porosity and connectivity. Supported in policy terms by the emergence of an expanding plethora of 'unusual regions' – so-called because they do not conform to any recorded territorial, politico-administrative, boundaries (DEAS and LORD, 2006) – from this alternative perspective interpreting regions as spaces of movement and circulation (of goods, technologies, knowledge, people, finance and information) "reveals not an 'area', but a complex and unbounded lattice of articulations" (ALLEN et al., 1998, p. 65).

All of which is leading to suggestions that we might now be living in a new relationally constituted 'regional world' (cf. STORPER, 1997), where capital accumulation and governance is "about exercising nodal power and aligning networks in one's own interest, rather than about exercising territorial power … [for] there is no definable territory to rule over" (AMIN, 2004, p. 36). But it is also prompting us to confront searching questions over the degree to which the relative decline in 'territorially embedded' conceptions of regions vis-à-vis the privileging of 'relational and unbounded' conceptions is part of some zero-sum either/or logic. For the first decade of this new century can be characterised by a theoretical impasse between those who remain steadfast in their view that the spatial grammar of flows and networks calls into question the usefulness of representing regions as territorially fixed "in any essential sense" (ALLEN and COCHRANE, 2007), and those calling for a retention of territorially-oriented readings of political-economy and when appropriate their conjoining with this non-territorial, relational approach (HUDSON, 2007; MACLEOD and JONES, 2007; MORGAN, 2007).

Today, interventions by scholars more inclined toward the latter than the former are doing much to suggest the dawning of a new era in these debates (cf. BRENNER, 2009a/b; JESSOP et al., 2008; JONES, 2009; JONES and JESSOP, 2010; JONES and MACLEOD, 2010; LEITNER et al., 2008; MACLEAVY and HARRISON, 2010; MCCANN and WARD, 2010). Most notable in this regard is JESSOP et al's (2008) attempt to devise a heuristic framework for theorising sociospatial relations as 'inherently polymorphic and multidimensional'. Stimulated by their conviction that those who ontologically privilege a single dimension (e.g. networks) and present it as the 'essential feature' of any given sociospatial landscape bend the stick too far and neglect the role of other forms of sociospatial organisation (e.g.

territory, place, scale), JESSOP et al envision a future where the privileging of any one single-dimension is replaced by an understanding that what really matters is how the relative significance of the multiple dimensions of sociospatial relations come together in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts, to secure the overall coherence of capitalist, and other, social formations. A proposition which suggests that in future it will be important to see such conceptual development "as a set of overlapping tendencies in which some ideas are residual (former dominant ideas that are losing their academic power), some are new dominant ideas and some are emerging, perhaps to challenge the dominant ideas in the future" (PAASI, 2008, p. 407).

All of which marks an important departure from the 'either/or' versus 'both/and' debate – itself the subject of much conjecture in this journals recent past (see *REGIONAL STUDIES* 41, 9, 2007). Indeed, the current issue goes a long way to highlighting how it is already a catalyst for new inquiries into how best to conceptualise regions and regional change. But at the same time it serves up a number of new challenges for the regional researcher. Not least of which is that although JESSOP et al are successful in making visible the politics of transformation occurring in social scientific thinking and presenting a strong case for more systematic recognition of polymorphy in sociospatial theory, how one then translates this into practice, i.e. more grounded and empirical research, is a key challenge currently facing those of us interested in interpreting spatial concepts like the region[i].

It is with this in mind that the current paper represents an initial endeavour to make visible the politics of transformation in an 'actually existing region', North West England. The aim is to initially demonstrate, then understand, how and why it is new combinations are emerging that appear more suited to stabilising society in today's new 'regional world'. To

achieve this task of making visible the politics of transformation the empirical part of the paper examines the three 'key diagrams' produced as part of the regional strategy making process in North West England following the collapse of the UK Labour Government's territorially-articulated 'new regional policy' in 2004. In adopting this approach the working assumption is that attempts to secure the overall coherence of regions is the goal of regional governance and, following THRIFT (2002, p.205), that "to govern it is necessary to render the visible space over which government is to be exercised. This is not simply a matter of looking: space has to be represented, marked out". The purpose of the paper then is to demonstrate how these 'key diagrams' represent a more than useful starting point for beginning to understand how these configurations are politically constructed. For it is clear they are not simply the outcome of capital accumulation strategies, but are mediated through institutional forms and diverse social forces. As such, the paper seeks to uncover the role and strategies of individual and collective agents, organisations and institutions in actively structuring how the multiple dimensions of sociospatial relations are brought together in different ways, in different moments, to secure the overall coherence of regions like North West England (JESSOP et al., 2008). For the unanswered question is not simply *which* sociospatial relations are dominant, emerging, or residual in any given space-time, but understanding *how* and *why* they are dominant, emerging, or residual.

CONCEPTUALISING THE RESURGENT REGION: FROM ONE-DIMENSIONALISM TO POLYMORPHY?

With the crisis in North Atlantic Fordism prompting the demise of the nationally-configured Fordist-Keynesian institutional compromise, the primacy afforded to territory-place is being

challenged and replaced by scale-network as the dominant sociospatial dimensions. In its broadest terms, this is seeing the *a priori* status of the nation-state as the arena in and through which economic management is conducted, social welfare delivered, and political subjects are treated as citizens challenged by the emergence and institutionalisation of 'new state spaces' (e.g. regions) (BRENNER, 2004). Moreover, and alongside this, the intensification of globalization sees these new state spaces (but also firms, capital, and knowledge) appear increasingly free from the regulatory control of national states and gives rise to what CASTELLS (1996) calls the 'network society', where the importance attached to *national* 'spaces of places' gives way to a *global* 'space of flows'.

It is against this backdrop that JESSOP et al. (2008) begin their call for a more systematic recognition of polymorphy in social scientific inquiry[ii]. They identify how the search for a new spatiotemporal fix for capitalism has seen the privileging of four distinct sociospatial dimensions – territory (T), place (P), scale (S) and network (N). Each associated with its own explicit 'spatial turn' it was assumed that, for a time, this single dimension possessed some exclusive explanatory power and predictive value, only to be challenged and overtaken as consensus switched to a different dimension of sociospatial relations. Successful in making visible the politics of transformation occurring in social scientific thinking over the long term, what follows constitutes an 'in retrospect' take on one-dimensionalism and how, perhaps unsurprisingly, it has characterised regional studies over the same period. The first part concludes by pinpointing how attempts to construct the 'new regionalism' as a new institutionalist paradigm for regional development in the 1990s revolved around a loose bundling together of these different dimensions, exhibiting all the weaknesses of one-dimensionalism identified by JESSOP et al. The second part then looks at more recent developments in regional studies, illustrating how and why relational and

territorial approaches are deemed compatible by some and incompatible by others, why it is necessary to think of regions as the product of fluid configurations of individual sociospatial relations, and how we might begin researching actually existing regions in this way.

Applying the TPSN framework to the 'new regionalism'

Despite a long and illustrious past, the 1950s and 1960s saw regions, regional studies, and regional geographers all deemed to be of diminishing importance and worth. This was due partly to industrial capitalist economies enjoying a long period of growth and the widely held assumption that the institutional mechanisms of spatial Keynesianism would ensure regional differences gradually disappeared. Part also had to do with those political parties seeking regional autonomy or independence having little support and being increasingly marginalised from mainstream politics at this time. That was until the late-1970s when the crisis in the Fordist-Keynesianism institutional compromise and, in certain countries, an associated upsurge in regionalist politics signalled the birth of a 'new' regionalism.

Much of this work was undertaken by political geographers and political scientists working in Europe, and centred on regionalism as a political movement for greater territorial autonomy (ROKKAN and URWIN, 1982). In this way it formed the basis of what became the political strand of the new regionalism, and the work of its leading proponent, Michael Keating. Commenting on how the crisis and vulnerability of the state enabled certain groups and actors to permeate political discourse, Keating's intuitive analysis of the new regionalism in Western Europe identifies how these conditions helped to foster a territorially-articulated politics at the regional level (KEATING, 1998). Empirically supported by the rise of regionalist and nationalist parties (prominent examples include the *Lega Nord*

in Italy and the *Scottish National Party*) but more broadly the European Commission's strategy for creating a 'Europe of the Regions', this version of the new regionalism is concerned principally with regions as actual or potential units – be they governmental or administrative. From this perspective regions are functional and bounded spaces, the products of politico-administrative action, and are principally articulated through the spatial grammar of *territory*.

Place has been central to accounts documenting a regional resurgence but not always under the banner of 'new regionalism'. In fact, it was in the 'new regional geography' of the 1980s that place assumed prominence in the lexicon of regional geographers. At a disciplinary level, the turn toward a post-positivist paradigm among geographers and sociologists in the late 1970s and 1980s led to a re-examination of the specificity of places and interpretative understandings of people and place (PRED, 1984). Not of regions *per se*, it was only in the late 1980s and 1990s that nonessentialist accounts of regions emerged. A distinguished proponent of this 'new regional geography' was the Finnish geographer, Anssi Paasi, who in drawing upon this new found emphasis on contingency and becoming, alongside recognition that places have a degree of integration and coherence, established principles for better understanding the emergence of regions "not as static frameworks for social relations but as concrete, dynamic manifestations of the development of a society" (PAASI, 1986, p. 110). These ideas were then brought into the new regionalist literature by the British state theorists Martin Jones and Gordon MacLeod. Noting their despair at how much of the new regionalist literature had concealed fundamental questions relating to how regions are historically constructed, culturally contested, and politically charged these

authors set about uncovering how regions assume their territorial shape in an attempt to theorise how regions are formed and transformed[iii] (MACLEOD and JONES, 2001).

A more controversial turn to *scale* in the 1990s accompanied the recognition that spatial scale is not a nested hierarchy of fixed platforms for social activity, but a dynamic concept. In the same way regions and other places are understood as both resources for, and outcomes of, social action, spatial scales came to be recognised as the outcome of those activities and processes to which they in turn contribute (SWYNGEDOUW, 1997). In the regional debates of the late-1990s and 2000s, the new lexicon of geographical scale enabled critics of new regionalist orthodoxy to argue how the relative decline in the power of the nation-state vis-à-vis the emergent power structures of regions is an "attractive and persuasive story" but one with only limited theoretical worth and whose empirical referents only tell part of the story (LOVERING, 1999, p. 380). Alongside this, critics were quick to highlight how the rise of the regional state was not necessarily or purposively at the expense of the state but an example of spatial selectivity by the state (MACLEOD and JONES, 2001).

Most recently scholars have been focusing on *networks* (CASTELLS, 1996). Stressing the importance of relations and mobility, research on the geographies of networks conceptualises the region as an open, fluid, and unbounded space (AMIN, 2004). Within the bounds of the new regionalism, this is aligned to claims that a certain type of region – the 'global city-region' – is coming to function as *the* pivotal sociospatial formation in globalization (SCOTT, 2001). Extending the logic that sees 'global cities' defined by their external linkages, global city-regions are networked externally on a global scale, as key staging posts for the operation of multinational corporations, and internally on a regional

scale, as rapid urbanism sees the functional economies of large cities increasingly extend beyond their traditional administrative boundaries to capture physically separate but functionally networked cities and towns in the surrounding hinterland. Supported by claims that these networked spaces are 'increasingly free' from regulatory supervision on the part of national states (SCOTT, 2001), in the most radical accounts networks are being set up in contradistinction to the predominant multiscalar territorial approaches adopted by both proponents and critics of the new regionalism alike (MARTSTON et al., 2005; JONES III et al, 2007; WOODWARD et al., 2010).

Acknowledging their own previous advocacy of a scalar turn, it is exactly this type of one-dimensionalism that JESSOP et al. (2008) disavow so much. For them the constant privileging of a single dimension contributes to the unreflexive 'churning' of spatial concepts and a series of troubling methodological tendencies: "theoretical amnesia and exaggerated claims to conceptual innovation; the use of chaotic concepts rather than rational abstractions; overextension of concepts and their imprecise application; concept refinement to the neglect of empirical evaluation; and an appeal to loosely defined metaphors over rigorously demarcated research strategies" (JESSOP et al., 2008, p. 389). Encompassed in claims that one-dimensionalism leads scholars to conflate a part (one dimension) with the whole (the totality of sociospatial organisation) in its place JESSOP et al argue for an approach that can grasp the inherently polymorphic, multidimensional character of sociospatial relations. For not only is it important to analyse how the relative importance attached to territory, place, scale, and network varies across space-time, but how increasingly it is the possible combination of some or all of these dimensions of

sociospatiality that matters more in securing the coherence of spatio-temporal relations (JONES and JESSOP, 2010).

This has important connotations for the new regionalism. During its period of orthodoxy the new regionalism was deemed a 'chaotic concept' (cf. SAYER, 1992), one that was guilty of bundling together too many diverse theories for it to be considered a coherent intellectual project (LOVERING, 1999; HARRISON, 2006). In this context critics referred to the way different theories were hastily coalesced under the banner of the 'new regionalism' with little consideration – other than some putative and loose attachment to the 'region' – of how, and in which contexts, they may be deemed complementary. In the current context a similar and related claim can be made that in the quest to present the new regionalism as a new institutionalist paradigm for development, academic and policy advocates were equally guilty of bundling together the different dimensions of sociospatial relations, i.e. work on territorial restructuring, new regional geography, state rescaling, and the network society (cf. PAINTER, 2008). Put like this, the new regionalism is an important example of the pitfalls of one-dimensionalism. But at the same time it provides us with a useful empirical test bed for considering the degree to which various dimensions of sociospatial relations can be deemed complementary alternatives.

Conceptualising regions: both networked and territorial

In regional studies, the debate over one-dimensionalism has its roots in a decade-long back and forth exchange between a group of relationalists who argue that territorial-scalar approaches should be jettisoned in preference of a wholly networked approach (ALLEN and

COCHRANE, 2007, 2010; ALLEN et al., 1998; AMIN, 2004; AMIN et al., 2003; MASSEY, 2007) and those who wish to retain and further develop territorial-scalar approaches alongside, and in recognition of, the increased importance of geographical networks (HUDSON, 2007; MACLEOD and JONES, 2007; MORGAN, 2007; HARRISON, 2010; MCCANN and WARD, 2010). Underpinning arguments made by the latter are claims that relational approaches are at their most convincing when analysing cross-border economic flows but they 'bend the stick too far' when relating this to acts of political mobilisation and cultural identity which are often 'territorially articulated' (JONES and MACLEOD, 2004). In conceptual terms the degree to which one interprets regions as territorial or relational must thus remain "an open question: a matter to be resolved *ex post* and empirically rather than *a priori* and theoretically" (MACLEOD and JONES, 2007, p. 1186).

If as PAASI (2008) suggests territorial bounded spaces have been like a 'red-rag to a bull' for many relationalists then the pigeon holing of relational approaches as useful for analysing regional economies but only partly useful for interpreting the regional polities is only serving to irk them more. Keen to underline how relational approaches are equally applicable for issues of politics as they are economics, ALLEN and COCHRANE (2007) now acknowledge that while it might appear in their earlier work that relational approaches are at their most convincing when analysing cross-border economic flows (cf. ALLEN et al., 1998), they are at pains to stress that more recent forms of networked regional governance evidence how "regional polities no less than regional economies may be seen to take their shape from the open, discontinuous spaces that are called here 'the region'" (ALLEN and COCHRANE, 2007, p. 1163). Here they point to the impressive array of non-standard regions and hegemonic discourse surrounding city-regions as clear evidence that regions are being

remade in ways that 'directly undermine' the idea of a region as a 'meaningful territorial entity'. For albeit these new regional spaces are often defined in the first instance by a narrow set of empirical and theoretical issues relating to their economic logic (JONAS and WARD, 2007), the design and construction of more flexible and responsive frameworks of city-regional governance is providing a rich policy context from which relationalists are able to advance their claim that "the governance of regions, and its spatiality, now works through a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from networks of relations that stretch across and beyond regional boundaries" (ALLEN and COCHRANE, 2007, p. 1163)[iv].

While we can all agree that there is undeniable logic to the relational argument that contemporary expressions of territory are being materially and experientially transformed by an untold myriad of trans-territorial flows and networks in the era of globalization, the final point relating to regional boundaries is of critical importance because it is here that the debate is currently being fought. Relationalists contend that with regional boundaries more porous than ever before and increasingly punctuated by trans-territorial networks and webs of relational connectivity, by its very nature this renders regional boundaries less important and increasingly redundant in the new 'regional world'. In very practical terms this is seeing 'regions' increasingly free to 'override purely political boundaries', with all the implications for regulatory supervision on the part of national states (SCOTT, 2001, p. 4).

Doing little to appease critics of these most 'radical' relational approaches, for them, the indomitable appetite of relationalists to vanquish territorial-scalar approaches is leading them to prematurely erase regional boundaries. While this may be desirable for advancing a more progressive and effective spatial policies centred on cooperation and collaboration

across regional boundaries (AMIN et al., 2003), as JONAS and PINCETL (2006, p. 498) usefully note in their analysis of the new regionalism in California, in the end you still have "to confront the hard reality of fiscal relations and flows between State and local government, jurisdictional boundaries, and distributional issues of each place in the State". Drawing a similar conclusion, Kevin Morgan is unequivocal in his assessment that:

> "To overcome the debilitating binary division between territorial and relational geography one needs to recognize that political space is bounded and porous: *bounded* because politicians are held to account through the territorially defined ballot box, a prosaic but important reason why one should not be so dismissive of territorial politics; *porous* because people have multiple identities and they are becoming ever more mobile, spawning communities of relational connectivity that transcend territorial boundaries."
>
> (MORGAN, 2007, p. 33 original emphasis)

In urging this caution, it is clear to see the logic and progression which has since led JESSOP et al (2008) to take this a stage further and develop the TPSN framework as a heuristic device for conceptualising not only two or more dimensions, but multiple dimensions of sociospatial relations. In justifying the need for more systematic recognition of polymorphy, these authors are unequivocal in their condemnation of those who continue to privilege one dimension above all others, expressing surprise at how much work in sociospatial theory is dominated by what we might usefully call 'all for one' rather than 'one for all' approaches to conceptualising sociospatial processes.

At one level, the sentiments expressed by these authors strike at the very heart of the 'practice' of sociospatial theorising. But at another level, they open the door to new and potentially fruitful ways of uncovering the different ways in which sociospatial relations are being organised in particular configurations across space-time and for what purpose. For it is important to note that it is not only social scientists that are guilty of prioritising one

dimension of sociospatial relations. Not surprisingly, political leaders and policymakers exhibit a similar tendency, often guilty of presenting a single-dimension as the necessary solution to a whole host of deeply political issues ranging from uneven development and interregional competition through to democracy and social justice. This is particularly evident in recent political praxis in the United Kingdom, and it is to this the paper now turns.

REDRAWING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE UK SPACE ECONOMY

Through most of the twentieth century national economies were described in regional terms to inform policy needs that were essentially territorialist in nature: in CASTELLS' (1996) thinking this was the national economy as a 'space of places'. In the UK this culminated in the Labour Government's programme of Devolution and Constitutional Change (1997-1999) and the establishment of a new parliament in Scotland, elected assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland, an assembly with elected mayor in London, and (to work alongside Government Offices for the Regions) regional development agencies and indirectly-elected regional assemblies in each of the eight English regions. In each case, the component territories of the UK were to find themselves in receipt of additional elected political representation, and by implication new institutional spaces through which to secure the 'new regionalist' promise of increased wealth *and* accountability. All except England that is; for when the English regions were presented with the opportunity to establish directly-elected regional assemblies, the first (and only) referendum held in North East England saw the proposal rejected by 78% of voters in November 2004.

All of which left England as the 'gaping hole' in the devolution settlement once more (HAZELL, 2000). But in so doing it opened the door to a new era of 'relational regionalism' (HARRISON, 2008a). Triggered by the unravelling of Labour's 'new regional policy', but also the changing geography of the UK economy in the latest rounds of global restructuring, a remarkable shift in the policy discourse was observed. Compare, for instance, the UK Government's take on subnational policy in England just before and shortly after the North East referendum:

> "We recognise the need to evolve our approach further to ensure that regional and local institutions have the capability, capacity and confidence to overcome regional economic disparities. Increasing institutional flexibility around targets, funding and central guidance, tied to stronger accountabilities and performance incentives, will help national, regional and local institutions work better together. The Regional Development Agencies, in particular, have an excellent understanding of what is needed to drive economic growth in the regions." (HM TREASURY, 2004, foreword)

> "Cities represent the spatial manifestations of economic activity – large, urban agglomerations in which businesses choose to locate in order to benefit from proximity to other businesses, positive spillovers and external economies of scale. This document sets out how successful cities 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." (HM TREASURY, 2006, p. 1)

Note that where politico-administrative regions remained as the organising feature of the UK space economy in 2004, by 2006 they had disappeared to be replaced by city-regions. Related to this, where the spatial grammar is primarily (hierarchically scalar) territorial in 2004, focusing on regional disparities alongside centrally-defined targets, funding, guidance, and accountability, the equivalent extract from 2006 is explicitly couched in the new lexicon

of geographical networks, with all the talk being of joining up separate business hubs, proximity, and cities contributing to competitive regions. This suggests the privileging of territory as the predominant sociospatial dimension has been replaced by networks in the policy discourse – a point reinforced by a sustained period of city-region institution building in England.

In months immediately after the North East referendum various alternative solutions were afforded a political hearing. Included in this were calls for an English Parliament, English votes on English laws, English independence, strengthened local government, elected mayors, a return to elected regional assemblies sometime in the future, and city-regions. Each was offering a territorially-embedded alternative form of organisation that, in principle, would plug the politico-institutional gap left by the failure to establish elected regional assemblies. That was all except city-regions. Couched in language extolling the virtues of more networked forms of governance for achieving competitiveness, city-regions successfully captured the imagination of an eclectic group comprising academics, policy think-tanks, and individual government ministers/departments, all of who stressed the role city-regions could play in the future development of regional policy. The Government soon agreed, signalling their intent to promote more networked forms of regional governance when in their inquiry into '*Is there a Future for Regional Government?*' they dispensed with probing future directions for regions *per se*, choosing instead to focus solely on what role city-regions would play in the future development of regional policy (COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 2007).

The result has been a series of government inspired policy measures designed to operate at a variously defined city-regional scale, including: the Northern Way growth

initiative, comprising eight city-regions each with their own city-region development programme; City Development Companies, city or city-region wide economic development companies designed to drive economic growth and regeneration; Multi Area Agreements, designed to enable local authorities to engage in more effective cross-boundary working across the economic footprint of an area; and, the establishment of two statutory city-regions in Leeds and Manchester. With the incoming Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government signalling their intention to abolish Regional Development Agencies, and support for Local Enterprise Partnerships – joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by groups of local authorities to support local economic development – in their place, compelling evidence exists to suggest these new state spatial strategies are compatible with a shift from a spatio-temporal fix organised around territory-scale to one which now prioritises "a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from the networks of relations that stretch across and beyond given regional boundaries" (ALLEN and COCHRANE, 2007, p. 1163). Nevertheless, the open question remains to what degree these more 'relational and unbounded' forms of regional governance are replacing inherited forms of 'territorially embedded' state spatial organisation? And if as many argue they are not, then to what degree and in which contexts are these more networked forms of regional governance compatible with existing forms of 'territorially embedded' state spatial organisation? To analyse these and other questions, the reminder of the paper examines the politics of transformation involved in securing the overall coherence of North West England following the unravelling of Labour's 'new regional policy' in 2004.

MAKING VISIBLE THE POLITICS OF TRANSFORMATION IN ENGLAND'S NORTHWEST[v]

A former industrial region, North West England has already proved to be an important lens through which to analyse the new regionalism (cf. DEAS, 2006; JONES and MACLEOD, 1999; 2002; HARRISON, 2008b). In part this reflects a history of institution building pre-dating Labour's programme of Devolution and Constitutional Change (BURCH and HOLLIDAY, 1993; TICKELL *et al*, 1995). But part has to do with the region being one of the most socio-economically polarised. Recent figures measuring Gross Value Added suggest the regional economy is worth £119 billion per annum, making the North West the UK's largest regional economy outside London and the South East and larger than fifteen EU countries. Having said that, GVA per head remains 6.2% below the England average, with the region containing fourteen of the twenty-five most deprived districts, including the five most deprived. Add to this the fact the region had the largest funded English RDA in gross terms, many believed Labour's 'new regional policy' would benefit the North West more than most from the new regionalist policy orthodoxy[vi].

Today, much anecdotal evidence points to the North West being at the forefront of endeavours to build more networked forms of regional governance. Nationally, the region is home to three Northern Way city-regions (Manchester, Liverpool, Central Lancashire), two City Development Companies (Liverpool, Pennine Lancashire), four Multi-Area Agreements (Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Pennine Lancashire, Fylde Coast), one statutory city-region (Manchester), and eight proposed Local Enterprise Partnerships. Of more international note is the new Atlantic Gateway – a unique collaboration between the Manchester and Liverpool city-regions, the Atlantic Gateway constitutes a £50 billion strategic framework designed to create a growth area to rank alongside Europe's strongest metropolitan

economies (NWDA, 2010). Taken together, the North West offers a fertile terrain upon which to examine the politics underpinning attempts to configure an actually existing region in the face of territorialising and de-territorialising processes.

For the past decade, this task of bringing 'coherence' to the region has jointly fallen to the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA), the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) and Government Office North West. In particular, the NWDA has had overall responsibility for orchestrating regional economic development while the NWRA had responsibility for all aspects of regional spatial planning. Since their establishment in 1999, the NWDA has been responsible for producing the region's economic strategy (a visionary document which outlines specific regional priorities for driving economic growth in the region) while the NWRA had responsibility up until 2009 for the region's spatial strategy (a statutory planning document that provides a broad development strategy focused on infrastructure, housing, and land use activities). As regional institutions, the spatial coverage of these strategies and by implication their day-to-day activities are defined by the politico-administrative regional boundary, so not surprisingly, the spatial visions produced in the period up to 2004 fit neatly within the formal structures of territorial governance. Yet all this was to change following the collapse of Labour's 'new regional policy'.

2004-2006: Territory → Network

In 2004 the North West was at the forefront of attempts to establish elected regional assemblies. A year previous the region recorded by some considerable distance the highest number of positive responses to a government consultation, welcoming the opportunity to vote on establishing an elected regional assembly. Not surprisingly the North West, along

with the North East and Yorkshire and Humberside regions, were nominated as the first regions to be offered a referendum. But the resounding rejection of the proposal in the North East meant the North West never got this opportunity. Like many regions, key actors in the North West subsequently switched tack and embarked on a path that was increasingly open to the possibilities of more networked forms of regional governance.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the political construction of *The Northern Way*. Published on 2nd February 2004, *Making it Happen: The Northern Way* (ODPM, 2004) outlined the UK Government's vision to establish the north of England as an area of exceptional opportunity combining a world-class economy with a superb quality of life, able to close the prosperity gap between the northern England and the UK average. First conceived on the campaign trail for elected regional assemblies in January 2004, the *Northern Way* was to dovetail the economic aspects of the regional agenda (tied to the work of RDAs) with the political and constitutional aspects (in the form of ERA) across the three northern regions. The initial spatial vision made visible plans for a new pan-regional growth strategy based around two growth corridors – one stretching from Liverpool in the west to Hull in the east, the other connecting Newcastle in the north to Sheffield in the south. Appearing without prior notice or consultation, the task of making the vision a reality fell to the three northern RDA.

On 26th February 2004 the three RDAs announced the formation of a Northern Way Steering Group, consisting of the Chairs of the three RDA, leaders of the three regional assemblies, representatives from three Core Cities (a group established in 1995 to represent England's eight leading regional cities, five of which are in northern England), and representatives from housing, universities and developers. With extensive input from the

RDAs, the result was a much revised second version, *Moving Forward: The Northern Way*, which appeared six months later (NWSG, 2004). Most striking was how the original spatial vision of growth corridors was substituted by a multi-nodal inter-urban networked based on eight interacting, but hierarchically-differentiated, city-regions[vii]. Looking increasingly like a relationally-networked trans-territorial region, the magical disappearance of administrative boundaries, the identification of eight city-regions as key nodes in the space economy, and the recognition that the most prominent lines on the map identified important flows as opposed to politico-administrative boundaries ensured this map became synonymous with claims the UK space economy was not just being discussed in relational terms, but represented and defined as a relationally networked 'space of flows' (HARRISON, 2010).

With Regional Assemblies fulfilling a key role in the Steering Committee the advent of the Northern Way posed a major dilemma for the NWDA/NWRA: how best to manage their statutory responsibilities for developing economic and spatial strategies based on territorially defined politico-administrative boundaries whilst at the same time driving forward new networked governance arrangements that stretch across and beyond their regions boundary? In other words, regional institutions were thrust to the forefront of contemporary debates on how best to manage the struggle and tension between territorialising and de-territorialising processes (cf. HUDSON, 2007). Coming a little over twelve months after the North East referendum, the publication of the 2006 (draft) Regional Spatial Strategy provided clear evidence that the NWRA believed a networked 'spaces of flows' approach was now essential to bringing 'coherence' to the North West, and perhaps equally important, to maintaining their legitimacy for coordinating the region, its economy and polity (Fig. 1).

At first glance, the relative weight afforded to the four first-order dimensions of socio-spatiality clearly prioritises one dimension (networks) over the other three (territory, place, scale). This is evidenced by (1) the most prominent lines on the map referring to international, national, and regional connectivity; (2) the focus on north-south and east-west growth corridors which map on to the major motorways and rail networks and a legacy of the Northern Way's original focus on growth corridors; (3) the prominence afforded to airports and ports as international gateways; (4) the spatial selection of the three Northern Way city-regions as pivotal spatial formations; and, (5) none of these more networked forms of regional governance conforming to any known political or administrative unit. Alongside this, place is evidently important as denoted by the identification of regional centres, regional towns and cities, and key service centres, but interestingly these are not connected up to form a network, while their place identity is also deemed unimportant. More noteworthy is that a territorial conception of the region is clearly deemed to be a former dominant idea losing its political power. The only territorial articulation evident is the regional boundary (albeit inaccurately defined as it includes three areas not formally constituent parts of the region), but indicative of the privileging of networks at this time, this is faded out where lines of flow are at their most pervasive.

Relating this back to the conceptual debates outlined above, the 2006 key diagram clearly reflects the tremendous academic and political appeal in presenting networks as the most appropriate perspective from which to view the region. Cities are privileged (as key nodes) in the space economy, the regional boundary is shown to be open and porous at points where flows are at their most pervasive, and new relationally networked spaces are

shown to be cutting across the territorial map that prevailed though the twentieth century. Alongside this, the three city-regions are constructed in a way that is clearly indicative of SCOTT's (2001) 'global city-region' concept. Each city-region is shown to be networked externally, illustrated by the lines of flow extending beyond the region, and internally, by the functional economy extending from a core area to capture physically separate but functionally networked cities and towns in the surrounding hinterland.

All in all the 2006 (draft) Regional Spatial Strategy is indicative of the 'relational and unbound' region attempting to break free from its territorially bounded politico-administrative regional straightjacket. As such, it could be used as evidence to support ALLEN and COCHRANE's (2007) contention that regions are being remade in ways that directly undermine the idea of a region as a meaningful territorial entity. Moreover, the relative decline in territory vis-à-vis the privileging of networks as structuring principles for the strategic coordination of the North West is clearly indicative of one-dimensionalism in action.

So why, you might ask, did regional institutions privilege a networked approach to the strategic coordination of the region when they themselves are territorially bound? Well as noted RDAs and RAs were always part of a much grander plan. But coming so soon after the failure in the North East to approve plans for ERAs, these institutions were extremely vulnerable as the magnitude of defeat threw into question the validity of maintaining unelected regional institutions. Certainly the rhetoric from the UK government suggested regional institutions and their legitimacy for managing the economy was under threat, with the suggestion being that "further devolution needs to encourage and reinforce this co-ordination and collaboration and so ensure maximum impact by better aligning decision-

making with real economic geographies such as city-regions" (CLG, 2006, p.73). Place this alongside the emergence of new institutional frameworks of city-regional governance and it is not difficult to see how circumstances dictated to the actors involved in producing the 2006 draft Regional Spatial Strategy that a relational approach to strategic coordination was necessary at three levels: first, as part of a capital accumulation strategy suggesting networks are the essential feature of modern day globalization and city-regions the pivotal sociospatial formation for anchoring and nurturing wealth creating activity; second, as a response to the failure of previous state intervention, in this case the collapse of Labour's 'new regional policy'; and third, the link between RDAs and RAs to this failed state spatial strategy meant it was key to maintaining their institutional legitimacy for continuing to coordinate regional economic development.

When taken together, these points reinforce how the one-dimensional swing to networks must be seen as a deliberate tactic, part of a wider strategy to politically construct the North West region in this way, at this time, for this purpose. It is equally important to note that albeit the regional boundary remains visible, this relational conception is presented as if this space was a blank canvas. In other words, there is little or no consideration of how this new spatial strategy would complement, contradict, overlap or compete with inherited patterns and structures of sociospatial organisation.

2006-2008: Network → Territory and Network

By the time the 2008 (adopted) Regional Spatial Strategy was published the relative weight afforded to the four first-order dimensions of spatial relations had shifted (Fig. 2). Most

notable is how territory re-emerged to challenge the dominance of networks. Illustrated in the first instance by the regional boundary (accurately defined) being the most prominent line on the map, perhaps more striking is how the three Northern Way city-regions are also clearly defined by hard, unambiguous lines on the map. Replacing the loose, ambiguous, and schematic interpretation of global city-regions in the making from 2006, the spatiality of the regions Northern Way city-regions now map directly onto known political and administrative units, with each politically constructed around a coalition of local authorities and therefore bounded by local authority boundaries which extend to, but never beyond, the regional boundary.

In contrast, networks are now presented as former dominant ideas gradually losing some of their political appeal. Lines representing important flows become secondary to the aforementioned territorially articulated region and city-region boundaries. Airports and ports also assume less prominence as international connections are played down in favour of national and regional connections (i.e. road and public transport corridors).

<mark>*** Insert Figure 2 here ***</mark>

This is not, however, to suggest networks have been replaced by territory as part of some one-dimensional conception of the region. Networks are still important, as evidenced by (1) the connecting up of regional centres to regional towns and cities to form a multi-nodal inter-urban network[viii]; (2) the identification of universities as spaces of knowledge production and key nodes in global circuits of knowledge circulation; and (3) those connections beyond the region being to cities and city-regions. Important to note is how despite territorial boundaries becoming generally less visible (invisible in places) in the period immediately after the collapse of Labour's 'new regional policy', networks and their

new institutional forms have clearly been unable to escape the existing territorial mosaic of politico-administrative units and their boundaries in the way that relationalists argue they can.

What we see in 2008 then is an attempt to make more networked forms of governance compatible with existing forms of 'territorially embedded' state spatial organisation. It is clear, for example, that networked forms of city-region governance are themselves politically constructed as the product of a struggle and tension between territorialising and de-territorialising processes (HARRISON, 2010). For sure, to make this more networked approach compatible with a territorially embedded conception of the region a different definition of the 'city-region' was required. In this case that meant jettisoning the 'global city-region' definition adopted in 2006 to promote a relational conception of the region, and replacing it instead with the definition used by the UK government – for whom a city-region is "a functionally inter-related geographical area comprising a central, or core city, as part of a network of urban centres and rural hinterlands. A little bit like the hub (city) and the spokes (surrounding urban/rural areas) on a bicycle wheel" (ODPM, 2005, no pagination).

Relating this to the theoretical debates outlined above, the notion of networks being unable to escape the existing territorial mosaic of politico-administrative units is indicative of how relational accounts have been challenged by those who contend that regions are the product of a struggle and tension between territorialising and de-territorialising processes (HUDSON, 2007). Conforming to conceptions of regions as both 'relational and unbounded' and 'territorially embedded' it also demonstrates how, far from 'escaping' regulatory supervision on the part of the national state (SCOTT, 2001), the state retains a pivotal role in

centrally orchestrating local and regional development. Indeed, this is crucial to any understanding of *why* the actors involved in producing the 2008 Regional Spatial Strategy saw it necessary to adopt a 'both/and' approach to conceptualising the North West region.

The *in vogue* spatial scale among policy elites in England during 2004-2006, by late 2007 the city-region concept was occupying a less than glamorous role in the shadow of another spatial concept. Reflecting diminished enthusiasm on the part of the state for city-regions, key announcements coming as part of the UK Government's major *Review of Subnational Economic Development and Regeneration* in England saw 'city-regions' replaced by, or made a subset of, the broader, more politically-neutral, and territorially-embedded concept of the 'subregion' (HM TREASURY, 2007). At one level, this responded to a growing recognition that although city-regions were the spatial concept at the heart of these new policy initiatives, the majority of new institutional frameworks established or planned were not in fact city-regional at all. Following on from the territorial articulation of the Northern Way city-regions in 2008, it quickly became clear that most Multi-Area Agreements and City Development Companies were anything but city-regional. Rather they were constructed around single or multiple local authorities, formed by the scalar amplification or contraction of previous territorially-articulated bodies. At another level, it was responding to accusations that a focus on city-regions was simply *too* city-centric – a case of 'picking winners' rather than the progressive approach to tackling uneven development that advocates of city-regions actively champion. Add to this cabinet reshuffles in May 2006 and June 2007, which saw key advocates move to positions in Government where they could no longer drive the city-region agenda, and it was hardly surprising to observe how networks in general, and city-regions in particular, lost some of their political power (HARRISON, 2010).

When put like this, the politics underlying the decision to configure the North West as both territorial and relational reflects how networks were a former dominant idea losing some of their power. But perhaps more important that this, regional institutions were no longer so reliant on networks for securing the overall coherence of the region, and ultimately maintaining regulatory control and their own legitimacy for coordinating regional economic development. The open question arising from this was whether this was part of some zero-sum, one-dimensional swing back toward the privileging of territory?

2008-2010: Territory and Network → Polymorphy?

In 2010 the NWDA published the 'key diagram' for the 2010 (draft) Integrated Regional Strategy[ix] (Fig. 3). What we see in 2010 is not evidence of a one-dimensional swing back to territory, but a North West region configured around a combination of the four first-order dimensions of sociospatial relations. Let us take territory first. The territorial boundary of the region remains clearly evident, albeit less striking than in 2008, and once again including three areas not formally constituent parts of the political-administrative region. Alongside this we clearly see how scale has been brought back in. In recognition of how networks are unable to escape the existing territorial mosaic of politico-administrative units and the UK Government's focus of late on subregions, the five subregions are made visible for the first time since the collapse of Labour's 'new regional policy'. In so doing scale appears compatible with territory. We also see a clear hierarchy of place – with subregions given first order, cities second order, and towns third order identification. Finally, if territory-scale appears as the (re-)emerging and/or newly dominant sociospatial relations then networks are a former dominant idea losing even more of their power. This is evidenced by (1) the

disappearance of city-regions, universities, airports and ports, alongside all notions of virtual flows, networks, and agglomeration; (2) connections to beyond the region no longer being to city-regions but cities and regions; (3) all flows being, in effect, truncated at or just beyond the regional boundary; and (4) lip service being paid to international connectivity in the form of a blank map of 'England's Northwest in Europe' juxtaposed alongside the 'key diagram' in the published strategy, where the North West is identified as a single stand alone territorial unit[x].

<mark>*** Insert Figure 3 here ***</mark>

What we have in 2010 then is a new approach to configuring the region – one that appears simultaneously *less relational* and *less territorial*. So the question is why having gone for a networked approach in 2006, a territorial and networked approach in 2008, did the elements come together in 2010 to form this new configuration?

Well one possible answer lies in the growing uncertainty surrounding regions. In the wake of the global economic downturn regions face an uncertain time. Economically, regions like the North West face uncertainty as to what the impact of spending cuts will be, what business will look like post-recession (Will financial services will again drive growth? Where will the jobs of the future come from?), how to develop a low carbon economy and the role of new technologies therein, the opportunities and challenges posed by rapidly emerging markets in Brazil, Russia, India and China, and adaptation to increased flood risk and climate change. It is hardly surprising that all the talk then is of this being the 'right time' to think about the future economic drivers of the regional economy, to 'think carefully' about the nature of future growth, and ask "fundamental questions about how our economy and society work" (NWDA, 2010, p.3).

Politically, uncertainty surrounds the future of all things regional. The Labour Government had already abolished unelected regional assemblies before the, then opposition and soon to be lead partners in a new Coalition Government, Conservative Party committed to abolishing RDAs and dangled the executioners axe over anything vaguely regional during the 2010 General Election campaign and in the months immediately thereafter. Place this alongside the uncertainty surrounding city-regions and is it is hardly surprising that no clear sense of direction prevailed. All of which leads us to an important question: to what extent are emerging configurations conducive to producing more effective spatial policies? For in the North West, if the emphasis on networks in 2006 and then territory and networks in 2008 was driven by a clear rationale and certainty amongst key actors as to why it was necessary to adopt this approach, the move to less territory and less networks in 2010 appears to be driven by a politics of increased uncertainty over the economic, political, and institutional future of regions.

Conclusion

This paper set out to make visible the politics of transformation in an actually existing region, North West England. Using the three 'key diagrams' as a reference point, the paper documents the trial-and-error search for a new configuration capable of bringing stability to the region following the collapse of Labour's territorially-embedded 'new regional policy'. What has been suggested is that since 2004 there have been three distinct moments, or periods, in this search. First, and triggered by the collapse of Labour's 'new regional policy', 2004-2006 saw an immediate one-dimensional swing from territory to network as *the* structuring principle for securing the overall coherence of the North West. Second, 2006-

2008 saw the pendulum swing back toward territory in recognition that networks are unable to escape the existing territorial mosaic of politico-administrative units and the regulatory supervision of the state in the way many relationalists argue they can. Finally, what we are witnessing today is a situation where the role of both territory *and* network as structuring principles appear in decline.

To briefly conclude then I want to offer a few observations. First and most obvious is how the three periods clearly mirror the development of academic debate in regional studies – with 2006 indicative of an 'either/or' conception of the region, 2008 a 'both/and' conception, and 2010 signalling an attempt to replace the privileging of one single-dimension with an understanding that what is important is how the different dimensions can come together to secure the coherence of the region in that moment (HUDSON, 2007; JESSOP et al., 2008). In this way the 'key diagrams' prove particularly useful in demonstrating how the relative significance of territory, place, scale, and networks as structuring principles vary in different socio-spatial fixes, while also providing evidence of how the search for a new socio-spatial fix is moving to ever more complex combinations (JESSOP et al., 2008).

Successful in making visible the politics of transformation, the second and more important step was to consider the politics underpinning how and why the relative significance of the different dimensions of sociospatial relations were dominant, emerging, or residual in each moment. What the case study of the North West was able to show was that although the region was initially configured around an emergent spatial strategy centred on networks, what we saw later emerged as the product not only symptomatic of a struggle and tension between territory and network, but between emergent spatial

strategies and inherited sociospatial configurations (BRENNER, 2009a). This observation is important for two reasons. First, and as BRENNER usefully reminds us, "the rescaling of state power never entails the creation of a 'blank slate' on which totally new scalar arrangements could be established, but occurs through a conflictual 'layering' process in which emergent rescaling strategies collide with, and only *partially* rework inherited landscapes of state scalar organization" (2009b, p.134 emphasis added). If we place this alongside the evidence from the North West whereby the emergent spatial strategy of networks is unable to escape the existing territorial mosaic of politico-administrative units, we begin to see the logic behind the need for ever more complex configurations in order to make emergent strategies compatible with inherited landscapes of sociospatial organisation, and for new conceptual frameworks capable of theorising the 'inherently polymorphic and multidimensional' nature of sociospatial relations (JESSOP et al., 2008). To this end, second, it suggests going forward that many of the answers to the questions we face today around in what ways, and in what contexts, different sociospatial dimensions appear complementary, overlapping, competing or contradictory will be found at the interface between emergent spatial strategies and inherited landscapes of sociospatial organisation.

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Figure 1: Key diagram from the 2006 (draft) North West Regional Spatial Strategy
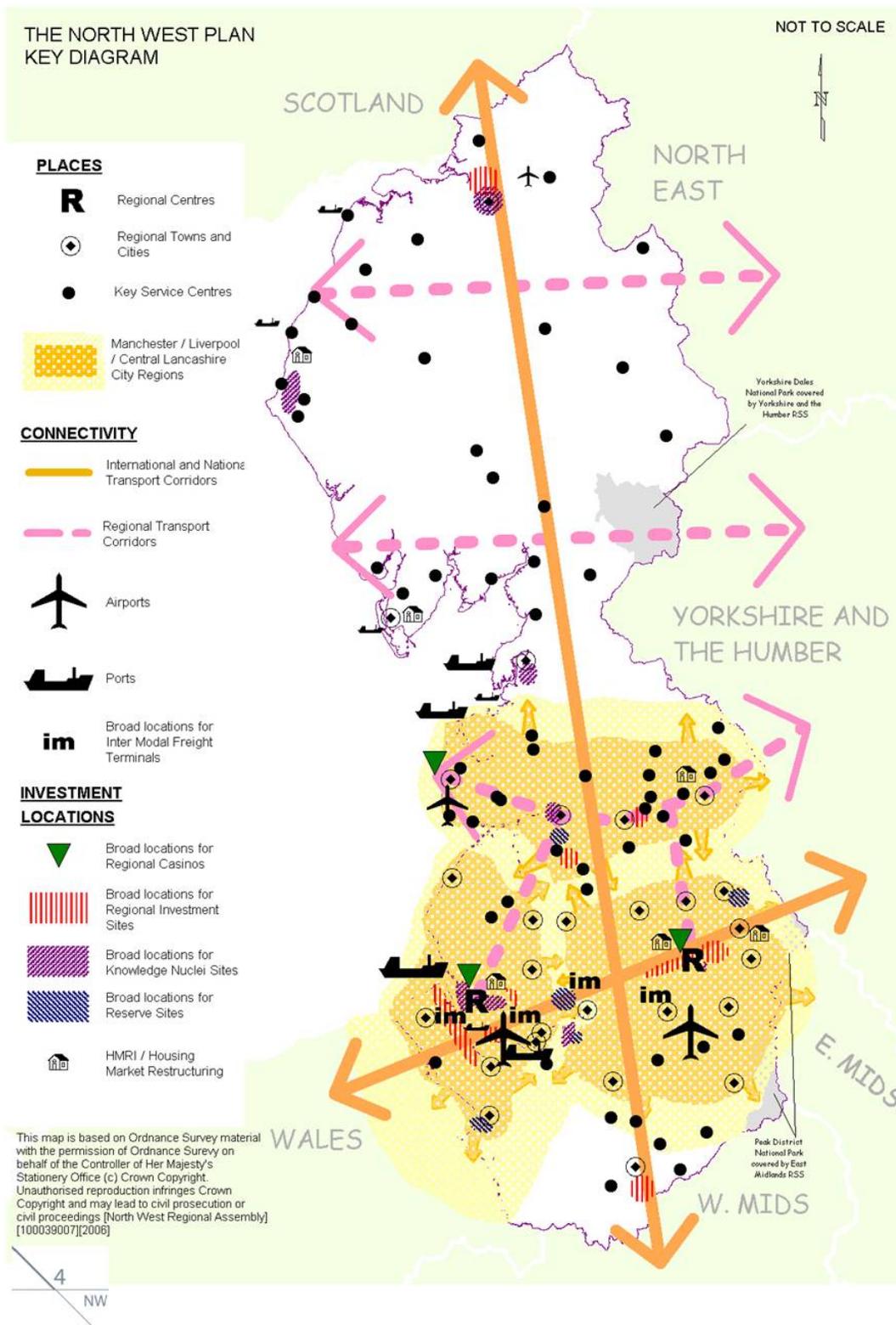
Figure 2: Key diagram from the 2008 (adopted) North West Regional Spatial Strategy
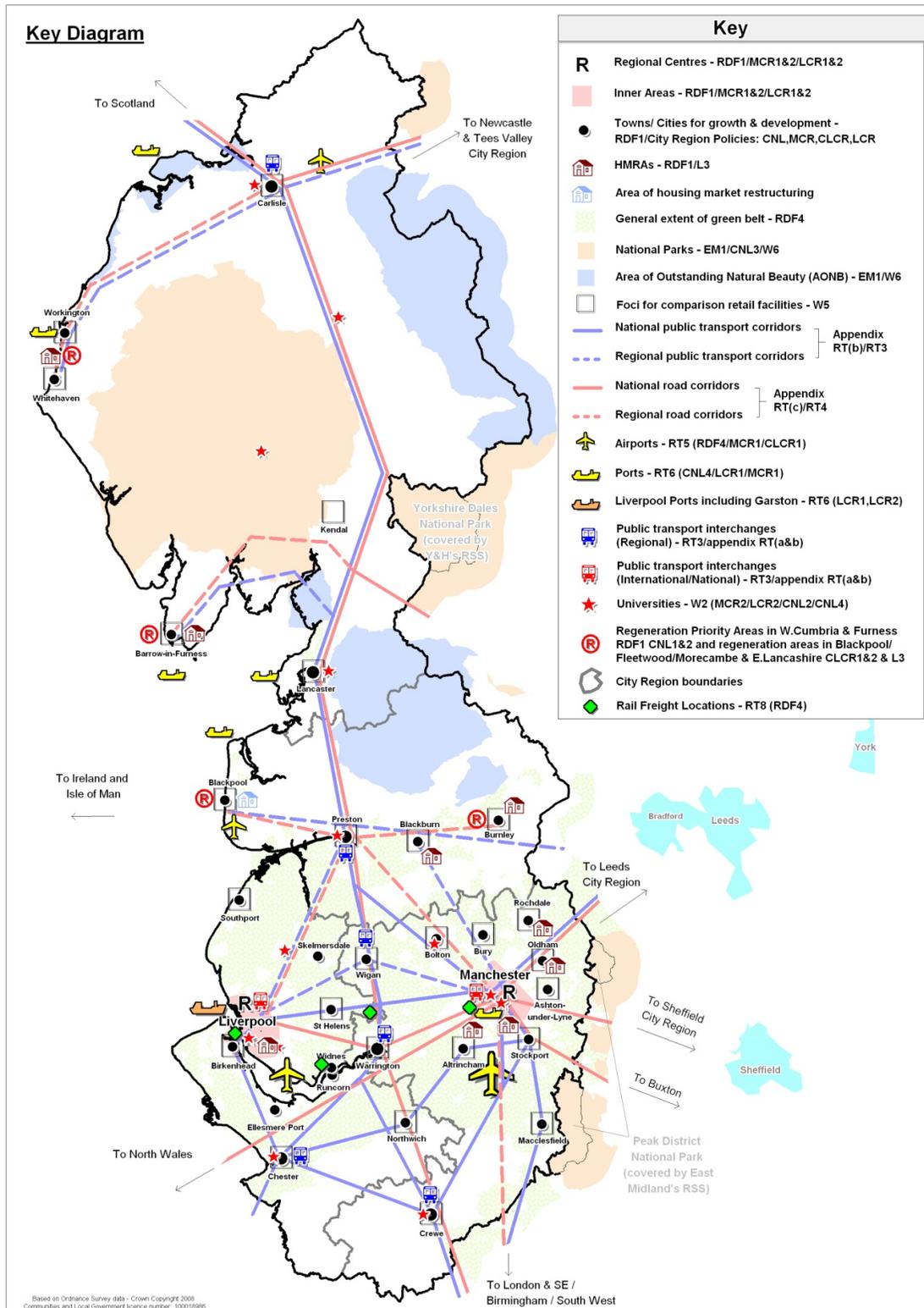
Figure 3: Key diagram from the 2010 (draft) North West Integrated Regional Strategy

England's Northwest

[i] Two of the original authors have since gone on to make a first attempt at this (JONES and JESSOP, 2010).

[ii] This is not an entirely new call, rather it has roots in earlier accounts on the polymorphic character of sociospatiality seen in the work of LEFEBVRE (1991, pp. 85-88) amongst others.

[iii] Often neglected in the accounts of radical relationalist scholars this was done in a way "befitting the current era of social complexity and ever more porous territorial boundaries" (MACLEOD and JONES, 2001, p. 671).

[iv] LOVERING's (1999) shrill warning to the dangers of the 'policy tail wagging the analytical dog' should be remembered here. This suggests that the enthusiasm of policymakers to adopt network approaches to regional governance leads to the construction of more networked forms of governance, which is then used as further evidence of networked spaces acting as autonomous political and economic spaces, thus elevating network approaches to a position of orthodoxy and fuelling further rounds of policy intervention.

[v] The following two sections are based on empirical research undertaken by the author and funded by two research grants – 'Regions in focus – a 'new regionalist' interpretation of England's Northwest' (ESRC 2002-06) and 'Cities and regions in focus – exploring the evolution of City Development Companies in the English Regions' (British Academy 2008-09). This involved documentary research and interviews with key actors involved in regional economic development and regional policy in England in general, and the North West in particular.

[vi] Recent figures seem to bear this out with the North West seeing the greatest rise in competitiveness of any English region since 1997 (CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS, 2010).

[vii] Available to view at http://www.thenorthernway.co.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=418 [Last accessed 15 September 2010]

[viii] Note the key service centres identified in 2006 have now disappeared.

[ix] Integrated Regional Strategy's were announced by the UK Government in 2008 and require regions to combine the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Spatial Strategy.

[x] It would be wrong to say networks have disappeared completely – but where regional connectivity had been about *virtual* flows of knowledge, money, and ideas in the years previous, in 2010 it now relates to *absolute* movements of people and goods via the regions' motorway and rail networks.