

REPORT FOR THE REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION:

SUMMARY OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE LEADING CITIZEN DRIVEN GOVERNANCE: COLLECTIVE REGIONAL AND SUB REGIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE UK AND BEYOND HELD ON 24th November 2008 AT THE FORESIGHT CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

INTRODUCTION:

This was the second of three seminars organised by the convenors of the research group: Joyce Liddle (Nottingham Trent University); John Diamond (Edge Hill University) and Pip Tucker (Devon County Council).

The particular theme of this event was the role, place and contribution of the Third Sector to projects, initiatives and developments with a particular focus on the experiences in the North West. A recurring theme/focus of these seminars has been the extent to which we can generalise our experiences and learning from a particular place (and time) and then how those experiences are framed and examined. There was a deliberate attempt by the research group organisers to "set up" the discussions which followed the presentations in order that those questions of how far experiences can be generalised, what theoretical and conceptual issues are being examined, how are the particular relations between local practitioners, activists and policy makers negotiated and understood and what are the policy (as well as practice) lessons that we can draw.

ORGANISATION OF THE DAY:

There were three sessions (each chaired by a member of the organising group) with three speakers in each session. All of the sessions were streamed onto the Centre for Local Policy Studies (CLPS) blog by members of the Unit.

Session one included contributions from Jack Stopforth (CEO) Liverpool Chamber of Commerce; Eamon Greene, Government Office North West and Richard Caulfield (Chief Officer) Voluntary Sector North West. The themes picked up by the presentations reflected the particular concerns, experiences and expectations (as well as the roles) of the speakers. Whilst there was a certain amount of shared or common views there were (as would be expected) significant differences. The common views reflected a concern over the complexity of initiatives and responses from central government; the particular context of the credit crunch and the implications this has for different sectors and how they respond to governmental initiatives; and the extent to which there are shared notions of time, a common language to capture the range of programmes and the extent to which there are shared values or expectations.

The differences reflected the specific organisational views/roles being represented. The extent to which we can anticipate the merging of ideas or practices was open to question as the presenters discussed their particular interpretation of what was happening. There are clearly real difficulties for both VSNW and the Chamber of

Commerce in seeking to engage with a debate on governance and the contribution of the "citizen" when the economy and the consequences of the banking collapse are still real (and the implications difficult to draw final conclusions on). At the same time the complex picture of centrally led projects (LAA and MAA as two examples) also need to be put in the context of the economy. We can expect that the situation will worsen and that existing ways of doing things will change. In this context understanding/locating the place of regional governance structures becomes both more challenging and necessary.

Session Two drew upon papers from Gareth Potts (British Urban Regeneration Association), Stephen Brookes (University of Manchester) and Brendan Evans (University of Huddersfield) and Geraldine Blakely (Open University). Each of these papers drew upon existing (or recently completed) research and as a consequence provided an important but additional point of reference to the key note presentations. The other significant point we would like to make is that each of these papers examined both theoretical as well as empirical questions. The value of the paper from Stephen Brookes is that it examined some of the debates situated within network theory and sat very well with the paper from Eamon Greene at the start. The contributions from Gareth Potts and Brendan Evans and Geraldine Blakely drew upon their work with community based organisations and so raised important questions surrounding governance and decision making. The paper from Evans and Blakely was based upon their work in East Manchester and so informed an interesting discussion on the relationships between regeneration projects, local decision making and local participation as a part of shared governance.

The final session included contributions from Simon Pemberton (University of Liverpool), Matthew Scott (Chief Officer the Community Sector Coalition) and Geoff Whittam (University of West of Scotland) and Kean Birch (University of Glasgow). The paper by Matthew Scott drew upon a personal narrative informed by his work in a Community Empowerment Network in London. It provided an important counter point to the ideas of change and development coming from central government because together with the paper from Evans and Blakely it gave real insight into the tensions and difficulties of effecting change within a neighbourhood or area against the prevailing culture(s) of the local authorities.

The paper from Simon Pemberton was an overview of work he has undertaken examining the context to the introduction of the Local Area Agreement model in England and its associated variations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It provided a real insight into the policy development processes and at the same time gave an important context to the discussions on change, governance and participation.

Geoff Whittam and Kean Birch drew upon their work (which has been published in *Regional Studies*) which examines the rise of the "Third Sector" and the implications this has (may have) for ideas of governance and change. In particular they spelt out their ideas on social enterprise and made links to the emergence of social

enterprise/entrepreneurs as part of the "solution" to the existing social/economic problems.

CONCLUSION:

There were about 30 participants at the seminar. The next event will be in Bristol on the 20th March. The themes to be discussed include rurality and equality and diversity.

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