



HAL
open science

Emerging Patterns of Governance in the English Regions: The Role of Regional Assemblies

Graham Ronald Pearce, Sarah Ayres

► **To cite this version:**

Graham Ronald Pearce, Sarah Ayres. Emerging Patterns of Governance in the English Regions: The Role of Regional Assemblies. *Regional Studies*, 2007, 41 (05), pp.699-712. 10.1080/00343400600929044 . hal-00514633

HAL Id: hal-00514633

<https://hal.science/hal-00514633>

Submitted on 3 Sep 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



**Emerging Patterns of Governance in the English Regions:
The Role of Regional Assemblies**

Journal:	<i>Regional Studies</i>
Manuscript ID:	CRES-2005-0026.R2
Manuscript Type:	Policy Debates
JEL codes:	D73 - Bureaucracy; Public Admin. Processes; Corruption < D7 - Analysis of Collective Decision-Making < D - Microeconomics, H77 - Intergovernmental Relations Federalism < H7 - State and Local Government Intergovernmental Relations < H - Public Economics, H10 - General < H1 - Structure and Scope of Government < H - Public Economics, R58 - Regional Development Policy < R5 - Regional Government Analysis < R - Urban, Rural, and Regional Economics
Keywords:	English regional government , Devolution, Multi-level working, regional assemblies

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Emerging Patterns of Governance in the English Regions: The Role of Regional Assemblies

GRAHAM PEARCE* and SARAH AYRES+

* *Aston Business School, Aston University, Birmingham, B4 7ET, UK.*

Email: g.r.a.pearce@aston.ac.uk

+ *School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, BS8 1TZ, UK*

Email: sarah.ayres@bristol.ac.uk

The case for elected English regional government outside London has lost momentum, but the machinery of regional governance continues to expand. This article explores the significance of this process through an examination of the evolution of Regional Assemblies. Each has progressed differently, but all Assemblies lack political legitimacy and resources and have struggled to mobilize influence in Whitehall and their regions. Although contributing to greater coherence in regional governance, their future is uncertain and there is a need to systematically assess what tasks Assemblies should perform, and why, and the resources required for their delivery.

English regional government Devolution Regional Assemblies

Multi-level working

JEL classification: D7, D73, H77, R5, R58

INTRODUCTION

By contrast to the constitutional changes introduced in the Celtic nations and Greater London, the Labour Government has adopted more tentative reforms in the eight English regions based on administrative decentralization. During its first term, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were launched to prepare and deliver regional economic strategies (RESs) and Whitehall's representatives in the regions, the Government's

1
2
3 Regional Offices (GOs), were bolstered to assist in coordinating national policies at
4 regional and local levels. Voluntary Regional Chambers (later retitled Assemblies) were
5 also introduced, comprising a mixture of local authority members and representatives of
6 regional economic and social interests. They were conceived as transitional bodies in
7 advance of the formation of elected Assemblies.
8
9

10
11
12
13
14
15 The 2002 White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalizing the English Regions* set out
16 proposals to enhance the powers of the GOs, Assemblies and RDAs (the 'regional troika'),
17 with the aim of improving decision-making, strategy co-ordination and delivery. Elected
18 Assemblies would also be established in those regions where there was evidence of public
19 support, expressed through referendums (CABINET OFFICE and DTLR, 2002). In the first
20 referendum held in November 2004 in the North East, however, an overwhelming majority
21 voted against the creation of an elected body. "A skilful 'No' campaign and a pervasive
22 antipathy to the prospect of 'more politicians', that reflected national not regional factors,
23 swamped any pro-elected assembly arguments" (JEFFERY, 2006, p. 67). More
24 fundamentally, the national debate about regional government revealed the weakness or
25 absence of any sense of public identity with the regions and opposition to an elected
26 regional tier among most local authorities. The outcome was to eliminate the prospect of
27 elected regional government outside London and to refocus attention on the roles of the
28 existing Assemblies.
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 Originally designated in the 1998 Regional Development Agencies Act, the Assemblies'
50 functions were ill defined, although the Act confirmed that they should hold RDAs
51 accountable for their RESs. More substantive advice on their scrutiny role was offered in
52 *Strengthening Regional Accountability*. Assemblies were urged to establish 'a stronger
53 analytical or research capacity to monitor and evaluate the RDAs' plans' and ensure that
54 their 'strategies and activities fit in with the wider framework of strategies across the
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 region' (DETR, 2001, p. 6). *Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change* (DTLR, 2001)
4
5
6 marked a further step in the Assemblies' evolution by proposing that responsibility for
7
8 preparing Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) should be transferred from regional local
9
10 government associations (LGAs) to bodies more inclusive of regional interests. The
11
12 implication was clear and the English Regions' White Paper confirmed that Assemblies
13
14 should become Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs). In 2004 Assemblies also become
15
16 responsible for preparing statutory Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), which replace RPG
17
18 and are intended to be integrated more fully with other regional strategies (ODPM, 2004a).
19
20 Indeed, the White Paper confirmed that Assemblies should engage in and contribute to
21
22 policy work in other areas, play an active role in coordinating the multiplicity of regional
23
24 strategies and work more closely with the GOs and other government bodies operating in
25
26 the regions. The Assemblies' wider role in representing their regions and promoting
27
28 regional priorities in Whitehall and Brussels was also acknowledged.
29
30
31
32

33
34 Alongside the GOs and RDAs, Assemblies are increasingly expected to act as a 'third
35
36 force' in the regions. Rather than relying on traditional hierarchies to secure their
37
38 objectives, they must engage in partnerships with representative or interest organizations to
39
40 influence the preparation and delivery of a wide range of regional strategies. They are also
41
42 expected to participate in the vertical or multi-level networks that connect EU, national and
43
44 sub-national government. The designation of Assemblies as 'voices' for their regions can
45
46 be seen, therefore, as an opportunity to open up new political spaces for the articulation of
47
48 regional priorities and visions.
49
50
51
52

53
54 These developments can be regarded as evidence of the emergence of a less hierarchical,
55
56 more fluid, networked and multi-level form of governance, in which collaboration and
57
58 partnership working increasingly defines the contexts within which regional policies are
59
60 formulated and delivered (BOGDANOR, 2005; BACHE and FLINDERS, 2004; HAUGHTON and

1
2
3 COUNSELL, 2004; RHODES, 1997). A more circumspect view, however, is that although
4
5 Whitehall may have relinquished direct control over the administration of a number of
6
7 activities, in institutional terms the regions remain thin and fragmented and ‘much of the
8
9 capacity and many of the skills required to successfully operate the new architecture of
10
11 regional governance are more likely to be located in Whitehall’ (MARSHALL *et al.*, 2005, p.
12
13 784). Indeed, reflecting Pierre and Peters’ (2000) call for a more state-centric understanding
14
15 of governance, it can be asserted that, because of its command over resources and the use of
16
17 bureaucratic measures, central government has retained, or even extended its powers and
18
19 control in relation to other scales of government (MUSSON *et al.*, 2005; MARINETTO, 2003;
20
21 SKELCHER, 2000). A closer examination suggests, however, that rather than the outcome of
22
23 a conscious strategy, New Labour’s ‘rush to the regions’ has been the consequence of *ad*
24
25 *hoc* and largely uncoordinated actions by separate Whitehall departments aimed at
26
27 improving regional economic performance and policy delivery (SANDFORD, 2005).
28
29 Furthermore, although all Assemblies operate within similar policy parameters, the pattern
30
31 of their activities may be more diverse than previously recognized (see for example
32
33 GOODWIN *et al.*, 2005). Each region has its own unique socio-economic and political
34
35 legacies, institutional traditions and styles of leadership and partnership working, which
36
37 have shaped Assemblies’ responses to decentralization.
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46
47 The purpose of this article is to critically examine the evolution of Regional Assemblies
48
49 within the changing context of English regionalism. It draws on documentary evidence and
50
51 semi-structured interviews conducted during 2003-04 with Assembly, GO and RDA staff,
52
53 representatives of the business and voluntary sectors in each region and Whitehall civil
54
55 servants. We begin by briefly assessing the regional institutional legacy. Second, the
56
57 Assemblies’ objectives, structures and resources are examined, including an assessment of
58
59 variations between regions. Third, because their effectiveness depends upon the
60

1
2
3 Assemblies' capacity to engage in networks, we explore channels of communication
4
5 between Assemblies and central government and their participation in inter and intra-
6
7 regional networks. We conclude by reflecting on the achievements and constraints facing
8
9 Assemblies and the factors influencing their future.
10
11

12 THE REGIONAL LEGACY 13

14
15 The political origins of Assemblies lie in the Labour Party's commitment to regional
16
17 government made during the mid-1990s. They were not, however, created in an
18
19 institutional vacuum and some regions, including the North East and West Midlands,
20
21 possessed a legacy of joint local authority working (ROBERTS *et al.*, 1999). By contrast, the
22
23 East Midlands lacked a strong regional identity, while the East of England region was only
24
25 established in 1994, combining the former East Anglia region with counties neighbouring
26
27 Greater London. In the North West a tradition of local authority rivalry hampered efforts to
28
29 secure greater regional cohesion, although agreement was eventually reached in 1992 to
30
31 establish the North West Regional Association, bringing together local authorities and their
32
33 regional economic and social partners (BURCH and HOLLIDAY, 1993). Similarly, during the
34
35 early 1990s Yorkshire and the Humber possessed, 'A weak local authority association,
36
37 which lacked a comprehensive agenda or political buy in from all the authorities or any
38
39 commitment to work at regional level' (Yorkshire and Humber Assembly official). In 1997,
40
41 however, recognition of the need to promote the region's economy and engage with
42
43 regional partners persuaded key local authority leaders to establish England's first regional
44
45 assembly capable of preparing regional land use plans, working with economic and social
46
47 partners, scrutinizing the regional activities of public bodies and identifying a set of
48
49 priorities around which the region's fragmented interests could be glued (YORKSHIRE AND
50
51 HUMBER ASSEMBLY, 1998).
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Neither the South West nor the South East possessed a strong track record of intra-regional
4 working. Apart from the preparation of draft RPG, the geographical size and diversity of
5 the South West hampered joint working. Prior to 1997, the South East was the only region
6 not to have a regional LGA, reliance being placed on sub-regional structures, while regional
7 planning issues were dealt with by SERPLAN, whose advisory role extended beyond the
8 region. Only when Labour's commitment to an elected Assembly for London and unelected
9 Assemblies in English regions became tangible were the region's local authorities induced
10 to join forces in 1997 to create the South East Regional Forum, predecessor to the current
11 Assembly.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24

25 AIMS, STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES

26 *Key aims and objectives*

27
28 All Assemblies perform similar tasks, including:
29
30

- 31 • Advocacy on behalf of the region,
- 32
- 33 • Developing coordinated regional priorities,
- 34
- 35 • Facilitating regional debate,
- 36
- 37 • Performing a lead/partner role in the production of other strategies,
- 38
- 39 • Playing the lead role in preparing RPG/RSS,
- 40
- 41 • Providing research and intelligence,
- 42
- 43 • Scrutinizing the activities of the RDA, and
- 44
- 45 • Scrutinizing the activities of other public bodies operating in the region.
- 46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56
57 Assemblies have a 'quasi-statutory' role as RPBs, for RDA scrutiny and co-ordinating
58 regional strategies and have sought to establish themselves as the focus for regional
59
60

1
2
3 partnership working. Nonetheless, there is limited consensus about the scope or the relative
4 importance of their activities, which reflects variations in socio-economic conditions,
5 regional identity and political aspirations. The North East, for example, is economically and
6 socially the most deprived of the English regions and is predominantly Labour controlled.
7
8 As a consequence the region is politically cohesive and its elites have been in the vanguard
9 of demands for new regional institutions (BENNEWORTH and TOMANEY, 2002).
10
11

12
13 By contrast, the South West region lacks a governing class committed to joint strategic
14 decision making and the balance of political forces in the region is unsympathetic to
15 regional government. Similarly, elected regional government has not emerged as a political
16 project in either the South East or Eastern regions. Here, development forces are a powerful
17 incentive for local authorities and other partners to collaborate on planning issues, but there
18 is limited pan-regional cohesion among elites, which tend to have a fragmented, local focus
19 and there is little enthusiasm for extending the range of activities discharged at the regional
20 level (JOHN *et al.*, 2002).
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36
37 In the West and East Midlands tensions about the respective responsibilities of the
38 Assemblies and the regions' Local Government Associations have been a source of
39 uncertainty. Because it was much larger, more influential than in other regions, the West
40 Midlands LGA had found it difficult to adjust to a more independent role for the Assembly.
41
42 By contrast, the East Midlands Assembly and regional LGA merged relatively painlessly in
43 1999, but in 2003 parochial interests reasserted themselves and the LGA broke its formal
44 links with the Assembly, leading to the establishment of separate chief executives and
45 secretariats.
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56
57 Despite traditional rivalries between sub-regions and local authorities, tensions between
58 local government and the Assemblies for the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber
59 were judged by Assembly officials to be less evident than elsewhere, easing regional
60

1
2
3 working. Although frictions remain, institutions in both regions share a common concern
4
5 about how economic forces can be managed to reduce disparities. A North West Assembly
6
7 official observed that the Assembly had brought local authorities together on a more formal
8
9 basis to lobby on behalf of the region. In Yorkshire and the Humber efforts have been made
10
11 to manage sub-regional differences by building representation from the region's four sub-
12
13 regions into the Assembly's political structures. Uncertainties had emerged around the
14
15 respective roles of the regional LGA and the Assembly but, prompted by the Government's
16
17 commitment to establish Assemblies as RPBs and assisted by Labour's dominance in the
18
19 region, these were largely settled in 2001 when the region's LGA effectively handed over
20
21 the 'strategic' regional agenda to the Assembly. Nonetheless, as is the case elsewhere, the
22
23 recent emergence of a stronger Conservative presence has caused the Assembly to adopt a
24
25 cautious approach to extending its activities.
26
27
28
29
30

31 32 *Structures*

33
34 Assemblies have adopted broadly similar constitutional and administrative structures.
35
36 However, because they are expected to be representative and inclusive of their regions'
37
38 interests, variations are evident (WHILE, 2000). On average each has about ninety members,
39
40 comprising sixty nominated local councilors and thirty representatives of regional
41
42 community interests, including business, environment groups, faith communities, trades
43
44 unions and the voluntary sector (Table 1). Community representatives are expected to be
45
46 selected through a fair and transparent process and be accountable to a distinct regional
47
48 constituency. Compared with the number of councillors serving most English local
49
50 authorities, the membership of most Assemblies is large, which reflects the need to ensure
51
52 that all local authorities are represented. Yorkshire and the Humber, by contrast, has by far
53
54 the smallest Assembly, only thirty-seven members, but this provides representation for each
55
56 of the region's twenty-two local authorities. In some Assemblies allowance has been made
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 for larger local authorities to nominate additional members and for 'top ups' for recognized
4 political groups, to achieve political balance. Full Assembly meetings are normally held
5 three or four times each year. Assembly Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Committee Chairs (or
6 their equivalent) are commonly elected every two years, posts being drawn proportionally
7 from local authority and partner representatives and rotated through the main political
8 parties and community partners on an agreed cycle. Responsibility for overseeing the
9 Assemblies' activities falls generally to Executive Committees or Boards, including the
10 Assembly Chair, Vice Chairs and a balance of representation from local government and
11 other interests.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24

25 **TABLE 1. ABOUT HERE**

26
27
28 Beneath the Executives are committees and advisory groups, described variously as
29 'forums', 'tasks groups', 'working groups' and 'panels', covering issues such as spatial
30 planning and transport, RDA scrutiny, the regional economy, social inclusion and EU
31 policies. Committees are usually made up entirely of Assembly members, while advisory
32 groups are partnership based, including local government officers, civil servants and
33 representatives of community interests. Assemblies also maintain links with Regional Rural
34 Affairs Forums and Cultural Consortia. Partnerships are viewed as essential to the work of
35 Assemblies and Table 2 illustrates those associated with the West Midlands Assembly.
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 **TABLE 2. ABOUT HERE**

49
50 Assembly structures have evolved over time; in 2003 the East of England Assembly
51 expanded its membership from thirty-one to one hundred, a change attributed to its
52 increased regional planning role and the English Regions White Paper. The creation of a
53 forty-strong Executive Committee and an expansion in the number of panels reflected the
54 view that substantive issues were not being sufficiently covered. In the East Midlands, too,
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 the publication of the White Paper stimulated the Assembly to appoint the Office of Public
4 Management to examine its structures to ensure it was fit for purpose. No change in the
5
6 number of Assembly members was made but, given its slender resources, the Assembly
7
8 was advised to focus on core tasks.
9
10

11 12 13 *Resources*

14
15
16 Initially, Assemblies were largely dependent on local authority funding but, as their
17
18 responsibilities have grown, they have become more reliant on central government. In 2001
19
20 the Government announced an annual £5 million ‘Chambers Fund’, over three years, to
21
22 support Assembly scrutiny of RDA activities and work to co-ordinate regional strategies
23
24 (DETR, 2001). Each Assembly was provisionally allocated £0.6m per annum, with £0.6
25
26 million being allocated to joint initiatives (Table 3). The transfer of the RPB function to
27
28 Assemblies was also accompanied by a one-off payment (Planning Delivery Grant), which
29
30 amounted to £6.2 million in 2003-04. In addition, Assemblies are in receipt of a £6 million
31
32 annual grant from the ODPM to support their on-going role as RPBs (Regional Planning
33
34 Grant). The provision of resources dedicated to planning work was especially significant
35
36 because, although all Assemblies had established RPG ‘co-ordinating teams’, they often
37
38 comprised only two or three staff, usually seconded from local authorities. The new
39
40 funding enabled Assemblies to expand their planning teams, promote a stronger perspective
41
42 on regional priorities, reduced local government’s control over the regional planning
43
44 process and raised the Assemblies’ regional profile. As a North West Assembly official
45
46 observed, “Superficially it may be about planning, but it’s also part of the Government’s
47
48 wider ‘region building’ project”.
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56 57 **TABLE 3. ABOUT HERE**

1
2
3 The balance of funding reflects the Assemblies' core tasks. The West Midlands Assembly,
4
5 for example, devotes about 60% of its resources to work on RPG/RSS, 35% to regional
6
7 strategy coordination and 5% to RDA scrutiny (WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY,
8
9 2004). Some Assemblies also receive revenues from local government training services and
10
11 contributions from other regional partners to support joint research or consultation
12
13 initiatives. The overall outcome is that in 2004-05 Assemblies had a joint income of some
14
15 £28 million, tiny in comparison to the £6.5 billion and £2.2 billion annual funding available
16
17 to the GOs and RDAs (JEFFERY and REILLY, 2004). About 60% of funding is provided by
18
19 the ODPM, but in the East and West Midlands and the South East reliance on central
20
21 government funding is far higher, raising concerns about the Assemblies' independence.
22
23 Assemblies have limited discretion over how ODPM funding is used, there is no block
24
25 grant and assistance is guaranteed for no more than two years ahead. They are also required
26
27 to submit detailed business plans and claims for expenditure to the GOs, prompting
28
29 resentment among some Assembly officials about the extent of 'micro-management'.
30
31
32
33
34

35
36 Each Assembly has an average annual income of about £3.5 million, but there are
37
38 significant variations. These reflect the variable populations of regions, levels of local
39
40 authority funding and the adroitness of Assemblies in taking on additional roles. The South
41
42 West and North West Assemblies have annual incomes twice those of the West and East
43
44 Midlands. Such comparisons are misleading, however, because of differences in the way
45
46 the funding of Assemblies and their constituent regional local government bodies is
47
48 managed in each region. A more accurate measure of their capacity can be gained from
49
50 examining the number of staff employed in the 'core' Assembly tasks of regional planning,
51
52 strategy co-ordination and RDA scrutiny. Some twenty staff are directly involved in these
53
54 activities in each of the East and West Midlands Assemblies while, of the fifty or so staff
55
56 employed by the South West Assembly, less than half fall within these categories.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Similarly, of the forty or so staff employed in each of the North East, Yorkshire and
4 Humber and East of England Assemblies, about half are engaged in these functions. The
5
6 North West has by far the largest staff complement of any Assembly, more than eighty. In
7
8 part this is explained by the number of staff engaged in the regional activities of local
9
10 government, but this is not the whole story. The Assembly has adopted a proactive
11
12 approach, including taking responsibility for the management of EU and national
13
14 programmes, activities generally undertaken by RDAs or GOs. When these operations are
15
16 discounted, the number of staff involved in core activities is not dissimilar to other regions.
17
18
19
20
21

22
23 Our analysis indicates that less than 200 staff are employed in core Assembly tasks. Given
24
25 the range of activities expected of Assemblies this is not a large number. Indeed, Assembly
26
27 officials claimed to be under constant pressure from the ODPM and other Whitehall
28
29 departments to perform additional tasks and there is a strong impression that Assemblies
30
31 face strategic overload. Assembly planning officials, for example, welcomed the
32
33 broadening scope of the regional planning and the increased opportunities for assessing
34
35 sub-regional planning frameworks. But they also expressed anxieties about the resource
36
37 implications, the security of future funding streams and the difficulties of attracting suitably
38
39 qualified employees. Staff constraints were also asserted to have hindered the depth of
40
41 RDA scrutiny and its extension to other public bodies. As a recent report on experimental
42
43 Regional Transport Boards (RTBs) concluded, while the case for giving Assemblies
44
45 responsibility for RTBs is persuasive, this cannot be achieved without a strengthening of
46
47 their professional and administrative support (DfT, 2004).
48
49
50
51
52

53 TENSIONS WITHIN ASSEMBLIES

54
55
56 As voluntary bodies with limited decision-making powers and funding, party politics do not
57
58 have the same resonance in Assemblies as in local government and work is characterized as
59
60 consensual. Nonetheless, suggestions that disagreements on party political, sectoral or

1
2
3 territorial lines have been suspended would be misleading. There are clear differences
4
5 between the political parties over the role of Assemblies, as well as distinct territorial
6
7 differences of interest. Indeed, despite Government guidance on the need for Assemblies to
8
9 take tough decisions on strategic planning issues, there is a tendency for local authority
10
11 representatives to focus on local rather than regional priorities, inhibiting Assemblies from
12
13 reaching a concerted view. Moreover, because of their perceived remoteness and the weight
14
15 of urban interests in regional politics, there is evidence of mistrust among rural interests to
16
17 Assemblies (PEARCE *et al.*, 2005).
18
19
20
21

22
23 The participation of economic and social partners in Assemblies, alongside local authority
24
25 representatives, is seen as an opportunity to harness the energies, skills and resources of
26
27 individuals with valuable experience and encourage them to 'buy into' policies at an early
28
29 stage. Assemblies, therefore, provide a forum for regional partners, often with very
30
31 different perspectives, to develop a dialogue and search for mutually beneficial solutions to
32
33 shared problems through building and sustaining trust. A South West voluntary sector
34
35 Assembly member remarked, 'We've been forced together in various task groups and
36
37 meetings and that's helped them [local authority representatives] to understand the
38
39 contributions we can make to the agenda'. The stress on partnership working has also
40
41 prompted various groupings of economic and social partners, especially the business and
42
43 voluntary sectors, to strengthen existing or establish their own regional organizations. In
44
45 theory, the outcome should be more refined decision making and greater commitment to
46
47 delivery. Assembly decisions, however, are not binding on any individual member and,
48
49 although policies may be supported at regional level, agreements may quickly unravel when
50
51 it comes to their implementation.
52
53
54
55
56
57

58
59 Some partners, particularly business representatives, clearly view Assembly processes as
60
irksome and several Assembly officials expressed concerns about the difficulties of

1
2
3 attracting and retaining business leaders with the necessary skills. Moreover, voluntary and
4
5 community sector engagement in regional partnership working is widely seen to be
6
7 hampered by lack of funding. Conversely, non-local authority partners were sometimes
8
9 seen to have unrealistic expectations in terms of their influence and, although relationships
10
11 had improved, local authority representatives were not always sympathetic to their
12
13 presence. Some authorities, for example, had resisted the assignment of voting rights on
14
15 regional planning matters to unelected Assembly members. A West Midlands Assembly
16
17 official observed, 'The name of the game is partnership working, inclusivity and taking
18
19 account of business interests. But, there are many councillors who don't accept that. Nor do
20
21 they accept that other stakeholders have a legitimate voice'.
22
23
24
25

26
27 GO and RDA officials confirmed this view, but some went further. They expressed
28
29 satisfaction with the competencies of the majority of social and economic partners, but
30
31 were critical of the quality of some local authority representatives. Furthermore, local
32
33 authority Assembly members with experience of regional working, gained through
34
35 involvement in the metropolitan counties during the 1980s, were reaching the end of their
36
37 political careers and their replacements were seen to have grown up in political traditions
38
39 focused on localities.
40
41
42

43
44 'I can't see many people coming through with the same sort of vision and authority.
45
46 The political system throws up leaders of sorts and we have to try and feed them their
47
48 lines to provide regional leadership' (Assembly official).
49
50

51 52 EXTERNAL NETWORKS

53 54 55 *Relations with central government*

56
57
58 Whitehall's perspective on the role of regions has evolved over recent years. Evidence for
59
60 this lies in the adoption of a long-term target to reduce the persistent gap in economic

1
2
3 growth rates between regions, pressures on departments to engage in cross cutting policy
4 issues with a regional dimension and the introduction of a regional dimension to the
5 spending review process. At the regional level RDAs have been granted remarkable access
6 to ministers and GO staff have links with their Whitehall counterparts across a wide range
7 of departments. By contrast, apart from meetings between ODPM junior ministers and
8 Assembly leaders and ODPM and DfT civil servants and Assembly staff engaged in
9 planning and transport policy work, direct links between Whitehall departments and
10 Assemblies are infrequent (AYRES and PEARCE, 2004a; MAWSON and SNAPE, 2004).
11 Government rhetoric might stress the merits of engaging regional and local bodies in
12 national policy making but there was limited evidence that this extended to Assemblies. ‘In
13 terms of what it feels like out here on the ground, I have to say that the impact has been
14 fairly limited, except in a small number of cases or areas, most of which are in ODPM’
15 (Yorkshire and Humber Assembly official).
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33

34 Ostensibly, regional institutions are being encouraged to generate regional solutions and
35 apply greater discretion over policy implementation. However, nationally determined
36 targets and departmental funding streams remain persuasive. The *Sustainable Communities*
37 *Plan*, for example, proposes major urban growth in parts of south east England, but the
38 South East and East of England Assemblies have both asserted that this cannot be achieved
39 without a step change in government funding for affordable housing, social and transport
40 infrastructure and measures to mitigate the environmental impacts of urban growth (EAST
41 OF ENGLAND ASSEMBLY, 2004; SOUTH EAST ASSEMBLY, 2004, ODPM, 2002). An East of
42 England Assembly official asserted that ‘over time Whitehall has begun to get the message
43 and in our lobbying we can see how briefings for ministers are changing’. Nonetheless,
44 though additional resources and some realignment of policy can be anticipated, there is
45 little prospect of the Assemblies diverting the Government from its housing growth targets.
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The ODPM's proposal in 2003 to create independent Regional Housing Boards, separate
4 from Assemblies' planning functions, was widely rebuked by Assembly officials.
5
6 Subsequently, the decision was reversed and, in recognition of the need to tie housing more
7
8 closely to RSSs, Assemblies have been charged with preparing Regional Housing
9
10 Strategies (RHAs) (ODPM, 2004b). Regional Rural Affairs Forums and Regional Cultural
11
12 Consortia were also regarded as anomalies because they report to ministers, rather than
13
14 Assemblies. Several Assembly officials commented ruefully on the unpredictability of
15
16 Whitehall's regional initiatives,
17
18
19
20
21

22
23 'We never know what reaction we're going to get', ... 'Not only are departments
24
25 different but there are different levels of understanding within them', ... 'The DfES
26
27 and DoH have largely bypassed the regional tier in favour of sub-regional structures.
28
29 DTI is tokenistic and when it thinks about regions it thinks of RDAs', ... 'DEFRA,
30
31 after a late start, is beginning to get a regional perspective into its work.'
32
33
34

35 Assembly officials regarded the Treasury's growing interest in incorporating a regional
36
37 dimension into spending reviews, improving knowledge about regional public expenditure
38
39 and adopting regional targets, as one of the more unexpected features of the evolving
40
41 regional agenda. They welcomed the Treasury's invitation to Assemblies, GOs and RDAs
42
43 to jointly prepare Regional Emphasis Documents to inform the 2004 spending round, but
44
45 were sceptical about their influence and the extent to which Whitehall's regional targets
46
47 could be aligned with regional priorities (HM TREASURY, 2003).
48
49
50
51

52 A further measure of Whitehall's growing awareness of Assemblies is the marked increase
53
54 in the incidence of consultation.
55
56

57 'It comes through in all sorts of ways and feels like a rapidly expanding and developing
58
59 agenda, as more and more government departments are developing awareness of the
60

1
2
3 potential of the regional tier. Where we have a legitimate interest there are opportunities
4
5 for influence' (South East Assembly official).
6
7

8
9 Similarly, the English Regions White Paper was seen as an important 'psychological step'
10
11 in signalling to government bodies operating in the regions, such as the Environment and
12
13 Highways Agencies, the need for increased dialogue with Assemblies and for greater
14
15 weight to be given to regional priorities. In practice, however, the principle task of these
16
17 institutions remains the achievement of programme targets set by sponsor departments and
18
19 accountability mechanisms discourage territorial flexibility.
20
21

22 23 *Working with other regions* 24

25
26 Historically, limited attention has been given to planning issues that cut across regional
27
28 boundaries, but the ODPM has urged Assemblies to consult with neighbouring regions
29
30 when preparing their planning strategies. The most conspicuous example of inter-regional
31
32 working is in south east England, where bodies in Greater London and the East of England,
33
34 East Midlands and South East regions are collaborating to implement the Sustainable
35
36 Communities Plan. Elsewhere, the RDAs in the three northern regions are leading on the
37
38 'Northern Way', a cross-regional approach aimed at supporting investment priorities in the
39
40 north's eight city regions (NORTHERN WAY STEERING GROUP, 2004). Similarly, under the
41
42 'Midlands Way', the East and West Midlands' RDAs, together with their key regional
43
44 partners, are discussing joint responses to the challenges of the Sustainable Communities
45
46 Plan and national productivity drivers (ADVANTAGE WEST MIDLANDS and EAST MIDLANDS
47
48 DEVELOPMENT AGENCY, 2005).
49
50
51
52

53
54 Other examples of cross border working, directly involving Assemblies, tend to focus
55
56 almost exclusively on staff contacts over planning issues. Indeed, officials confirmed the
57
58 difficulties involved in securing regular political links between Assemblies and shared
59
60

1
2
3 positions on policy issues. Where inter-regional collaboration had occurred, it had more
4
5 often been the outcome of EU or national initiatives, rather than a ‘bottom-up’ response
6
7 from neighbouring regions. To facilitate joint working between Assemblies and strengthen
8
9 the regions’ voice in central government the English Regions Network (ERN) was
10
11 established in 2001, part funded by the ODPM. Views on the Network’s effectiveness
12
13 varied. Several Assembly officials judged it well placed to lobby the ODPM on planning
14
15 issues, but were critical of its abilities to engage with other Whitehall departments. Others
16
17 expressed a desire to match the RDAs’ capacity to orchestrate a concerted approach on
18
19 major policy issues to ministers, but differences between Assemblies over priority issues
20
21 had hindered agreements. Given such sentiments, this Assembly official’s view on the ERN
22
23 was not unexpected.
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 ‘It’s amateurish, members won’t go to meetings any more, they’re not interested. It’s
31
32 easier to get social and economic partners to ERN meetings than local authority
33
34 representatives. If we want recognition we need to do something better than this’.
35
36

37 Many Assemblies have links with regions in other European states and all contribute to the
38
39 funding of regional offices in Brussels (BURCH and GOMEZ, 2002). By contrast, contacts
40
41 between Assemblies and institutions in the UK’s devolved territories are infrequent. We
42
43 were advised that the North West Assembly had engaged with the Welsh Assembly and
44
45 neighbouring Welsh local authorities on a cross border sub-regional planning study.
46
47 Similarly, planning staff in the West Midlands Assembly and their counterparts in Wales
48
49 have exchanged views on the RSS and the Welsh Spatial Plan. However, officials from the
50
51 North East and North West Assemblies described their contacts with the Scottish Executive
52
53 as ‘virtually nil’ and ‘difficult, they’re not interested’.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Regional co-ordination

The regional tier has emerged as a venue for the preparation of a proliferation of regional strategies, often promoted by Whitehall departments, including economic development, energy, health, housing, land use, sustainable development and transport. Nonetheless, a lack of co-ordination of the various strategy processes and uncertainties over responsibilities for the implementation of associated policy actions have often inhibited their delivery. Indeed, while institutions may be bound by a common desire to improve regional conditions, each is influenced by different agendas and accountabilities.

Despite these constraints, the Government expects the relationship within the troika to be one of partnership and co-operative working (REGIONAL CO-ORDINATION UNIT, 2003). Collaboration is clearly essential in managing the complexities of regional working and developing a shared understanding of regional priorities and considerable efforts have been made to foster dialogue between key agencies. As an RDA Chief Executive observed,

‘We promise to be nice to each other, as not to do so would have some negative consequences for the region. By relating together we can learn to trust one another and do things better. It doesn’t mean that it’s all sweetness and light. Life is about politics and tensions, but we’re working towards the same objective at the end of the day - a successful region’.

Because they are intended to cover not only traditional land use issues, but also the spatial aspects of a range of policies, including health, skills and social exclusion, the new RSSs are seen to have scope for co-ordinating policies and resources to fulfil both national and regional priorities. As a consequence, Assemblies have come under growing pressures from the ODPM to identify the level of public investment required to implement their RSSs, which has also given rise to demands from Assemblies for greater transparency in the

1
2
3 spatial distribution of public expenditure. There remains, however, an important distinction
4
5 between the capacity of Assemblies to both draft and implement RSSs. In practice, RSSs
6
7 are issued by the Government's Regional Offices and their delivery is largely dependent
8
9 upon Whitehall's spending plans, which may not match regional priorities. Indeed, despite
10
11 their statutory status, Assembly staff remain circumspect about the potential of RSSs to
12
13 redirect resources to meet regional priorities.
14
15

16
17
18 The English Regions White Paper also stressed that Assemblies should play the lead role in
19
20 coordinating strategies to deliver sustainable development, while GOs were charged with
21
22 the complementary task of supporting Assemblies in their strategy alignment role, by co-
23
24 coordinating the activities of public bodies in the regions and encouraging them to
25
26 incorporate a regional dimension in their activities. The task is challenging; in the West
27
28 Midlands, for example, there are more than thirty regional strategies and sub-strategies at
29
30 various stages of preparation, containing over six-hundred 'aims' 'objectives', 'policies',
31
32 'priorities' and 'targets' (AYRES and PEARCE, 2004b). Moreover, because the White Paper
33
34 allotted responsibility for regional coordination to both GOs and Assemblies, some
35
36 Assembly officials expressed uncertainty about how far they might encroach on the GOs'
37
38 role by entering into a dialogue and seeking to influence the extensive range of public
39
40 bodies operating in the regions. More generally, despite GO claims that they participate as
41
42 'equal partners', Assembly staff were critical of the capacity of GO officials to formulate
43
44 advice without reference to Whitehall and their ability to combine working with
45
46 Assemblies to prepare RSSs with their quasi-judicial role in examining and issuing the
47
48 strategies on behalf of the ODPM.
49
50
51
52
53
54

55
56 All Assemblies have made progress in scrutinizing the RDAs' plans and activities,
57
58 including links with other strategies, though 'less has been achieved in terms of Assemblies
59
60 being able to point to concrete impact and added value' (SNAPE *et al.*, 2003, p. 103). In

1
2
3 some regions, the scrutiny process prompted considerable hostility between Assemblies and
4 RDAs over their respective roles and status and the parity of esteem afforded to the
5
6 'economic' focus of the RESs and the 'environmental' and 'social' considerations in RPG.
7
8 According to Assembly officials, however, the introduction in 2002 of dedicated funding
9
10 for Assemblies to scrutinize RDAs in a more professional manner, learning through 'trial
11
12 and error' and a desire to avoid deadlock and damaging public disagreements, had helped
13
14 ease tensions. Senior GO and RDA officials also confirmed that increased dialogue had
15
16 improved Assembly-RDA relations, but were less sanguine about their Assemblies'
17
18 effectiveness in challenging or holding RDAs to account for their strategies, diminishing
19
20 scrutiny as a policy development tool.
21
22
23
24
25
26

27 To facilitate regional co-ordination several Assemblies have signed 'Concordats' with GOs,
28
29 RDAs and other bodies, including the Environment Agency and Learning and Skills
30
31 Councils, setting out respective roles and responsibilities. Views about the value of
32
33 Concordats were not, however, always flattering. The majority of GO and RDA officials
34
35 interviewed were dismissive while even some Assembly officials acknowledged that,
36
37 because regional functions are constantly expanding, Concordats quickly become out of
38
39 date. Officials in some Assemblies also stressed the value of their region's Sustainability
40
41 Development Framework (SDF) as a high level statement of the region's vision, which
42
43 provided a policy thread running through all regional strategies. Nonetheless, because
44
45 sustainable development is a less than 'clear-cut, stand-alone concept', there was
46
47 uncertainty about how the term should be defined and applied (HAUGHTON and COUNSELL,
48
49 2004, p. 26). As an Assembly official acknowledged, 'It's been at the core of our vision
50
51 since the late 1990s, though then we didn't really understand what it was or how to achieve
52
53 it'.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 In responding to the aspiration that all public bodies operating in the regions 'join up' their
5
6 policies, several Assemblies have adopted, or are in the process of preparing, 'Integrated
7
8 Regional Strategies' (IRSs). The process has been given added impetus by the commitment
9
10 to greater regional strategy co-ordination made in the 2004 Spending Review (HM
11
12 TREASURY, 2004). Their value is seen to lie in establishing a regional consensus around a
13
14 clear set of overarching principles or priorities, which provide the context for the
15
16 development of regional strategies. They should also assist in identifying potential conflicts
17
18 between objectives and priorities and indicate how these might be mitigated.
19
20
21

22
23 The East Midlands is further along this route than other Assemblies. It began with an
24
25 overall regional vision and a set of eighteen economic, social, environmental and spatial
26
27 'sustainable development' objectives. These would provide the template for assessing how
28
29 policies contribute to the region's wider objectives. In addition to promoting horizontal
30
31 integration, the IRS model also stresses the role of sub-regional actors in delivering
32
33 regional priorities. Progress has been documented against indicators in various policy areas
34
35 and work is continuing to identify the key actions and actors required to deliver the strategy
36
37 (EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY, 2005). Assembly officials suggested that the IRS
38
39 had improved regional decision-making through more joint working between organizations,
40
41 a shared understanding of regional issues and priorities and a clear statement of objectives
42
43 and outcomes. They also judged that the approach has the potential to achieve a more
44
45 effective allocation of resources by providing a coherent message about the region's needs,
46
47 both in Whitehall and to government bodies working in the region.
48
49
50
51
52

53
54 With regional partners the South West Assembly has also developed an IRS, *Just Connect*,
55
56 which sets out regional priorities and issues and aims to inform the activities of regional
57
58 partners. (SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY, 2004). Similarly, the Yorkshire and Humber
59
60 Assembly and its partners have relaunched the 1998 strategic framework, *Advancing*

1
2
3 *Together* (YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER ASSEMBLY, 2004). 'It's not a strategy but a strategic
4 framework, a high level vision containing agreed objectives for the region and with
5 benchmarks to assess progress' (Yorkshire and Humber official). Joint sustainability
6 appraisals, set in the context of the region's SDF, are being applied to achieve greater
7 consistency between RPG, the RES and regional housing strategy and arrangements have
8 been put in place to co-ordinate the preparation of the RSS with reviews of the region's
9 economic and housing strategies.

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20 Despite the outward attractions of an IRS, or similar document, they are no guarantee of
21 policy integration and a major challenge for Assemblies is to ensure that agreements on
22 regional priorities between regional stakeholders are followed through. The East Midlands
23 Assembly, for example, is seeking to extend the IRS to the co-ordination of delivery. But,
24 as an Assembly official acknowledged,

25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33 'When we start to raise the issue, the relationship between the region and its sub-
34 regions comes into play and it's difficult to convey the links to those engaged in
35 delivery. In relation to planning there is a neat set of tiers in which the Assembly plays
36 a key role, but not in other policy areas.'

37
38
39
40
41
42
43 Not all Assemblies have been enthusiastic about the need for a documented IRS. Although
44 having broad agreement on regional priorities is vital, creating regional 'meta' strategies
45 can be regarded as unrealistic, demanding in resource terms and introducing an unnecessary
46 degree of rigidity; 'An IRS is not the right way to proceed. The critical thing is to have the
47 regional strategy/plan making process in place and develop the networks for delivering'
48 (North West Assembly official). West Midlands Assembly officials maintained that the
49 regional Concordat already provided a framework for strategy co-ordination by setting out
50 the responsibilities of the key regional bodies and were resistant to the need for an IRS. The
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 practicality of delivering a joined up approach to delivery was seen to lie in constantly
4
5 making connections between strategies to determine how one impacts on the other.
6
7

8
9 'We don't need another regional strategy. We need to have principles and these can be
10
11 used as the conscience of the region. We know we need to ensure that strategies are
12
13 aligned, but let's do that in a bottom up way through an implementation framework.
14
15 You can best achieve integration by working at the practical end, the sub-regional level
16
17 where resources come together' (West Midlands Assembly official).
18
19

20
21 Similar sentiments were shared by several GO and RDA officials. They viewed the IRS
22
23 model as a distraction and offering limited added value to delivery. As a GO Regional
24
25 Director observed, 'In terms of [regional] co-ordination, the Regional Housing Boards are
26
27 far more influential in tying in the RES, RPG and environmental sustainability. They're
28
29 involved in all the elements, which will lead to something on the ground'.
30
31

32 33 CONCLUSION

34
35
36 This account provides a number of important insights into the Assemblies' activities in the
37
38 context of broader developments in English regional governance. It underlines that since
39
40 their inception Assemblies have fostered networking and collaboration between regional
41
42 stakeholders, assisted in the development and co-ordination of a range of regional policies
43
44 and played a constructive role in working with GOs and RDAs to influence and monitor the
45
46 achievement of collective regional goals. Moreover, in their capacity as Regional Planning
47
48 Bodies, responsible for the new statutory RSSs, Assemblies have become increasingly
49
50 engaged in coordinating land use, transport, housing and other policy areas and linking
51
52 regional and sub-regional working. The Government is committed to transferring strategic
53
54 responsibilities for regional housing and transport to Assemblies and, alongside their troika
55
56 partners, Assemblies have recently engaged in preparing advice to ministers on regional
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 priorities within a framework of indicative long-term regional funding, covering housing,
4 economic development and transport (HM TREASURY *et al*, 2005). Each of these
5 activities has assisted Assemblies in raising their profiles among regional stakeholders and
6 can be viewed as indicative of a broader process involving the rescaling of the institutions
7 responsible for policy formulation and implementation both vertically, between different
8 level of governance, and horizontally, between institutions serving the same regions.
9

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
Despite these achievements the limited executive powers available to Assemblies have
given rise to tensions and ambiguities over their responsibilities. Uncertainties have arisen
over the respective roles of Assemblies, RDAs GOs and other public bodies operating in
the regions and the status of individual strategies. Moreover, while Assemblies are formally
committed to engage a broad range of stakeholders, difficulties have occurred in balancing
fragmented interests and promoting greater regional awareness and vision. Furthermore,
although some Assemblies have been keen to establish Concordats with key regional
partners and prepare Integrated Regional Strategies, there is disagreement and lack of
evidence about the value of such arrangements in securing improved policy coordination
and outcomes.

Within these overall trends Assemblies have followed different trajectories, which reflect
diverse regional institutional inheritances and economic and social geographies. In the
South East of England, for example, the key policy challenge is to manage the problems of
economic success, while the main concern underpinning policy for the northern regions is
to boost their economic performance. Regional political differences have also played their
part in shaping Assembly priorities; while the Conservative dominated Eastern and South-
East Assemblies have eschewed political devolution, in the North-East the drive to elected
regional government was, until recently, an overriding concern. Similarly, the presence of

1
2
3 forceful local authority associations in some regions has influenced the scope of Assembly
4
5 activities.
6
7

8
9 Intra-regional factors have, therefore, played a part in determining the Assembly agendas.
10
11 However, there is no strong sense of any Assembly pressing hard to extend its current range
12
13 of activities. Indeed, rather than having the capacity to absorb additional responsibilities,
14
15 there are doubts about the Assemblies' competencies to cover their existing tasks. Far more
16
17 significant in shaping the Assemblies' activities has been central government. Given the
18
19 lack of public support for elected regional bodies and ambiguities arising from the centre's
20
21 preference to develop regional structures alongside and, in part, overlapping established
22
23 central-local policy relationships, Whitehall departments have been able to adopt a
24
25 piecemeal approach. Indeed, along with a wider assessment of the roles and capacities of
26
27 respective government tiers and institutions, there is a need to take stock of what tasks
28
29 Assemblies should perform, and why, and the resources required for their delivery.
30
31 Fundamentally, Assemblies are viewed in Whitehall as minor institutions compared with
32
33 the GOs and RDAs, which has constrained them from adopting a more holistic, bottom-
34
35 approach to policy making. Consequently, while Assemblies may work diligently to build
36
37 partnerships, formulate regional solutions and draw on the 'know how' of regional
38
39 stakeholders, a lack of political legitimacy and financial resources fetters them from forging
40
41 authoritative regional perspectives and exerting influence over the activities of key public
42
43 bodies serving the regions.
44
45
46
47
48
49

50
51 Following the result of the North East referendum in 2004 plans to democratize English
52
53 regional governance were quietly withdrawn. There are already demands from local
54
55 authorities for the Assemblies' accountability and coordination functions to be dismantled
56
57 and for responsibility for regional spatial planning to return to local government. There are
58
59 also calls for the creation of 'city regions', comprising partnerships between local
60

1
2
3 authorities serving the major provincial cities and their hinterlands, with the financial and
4 political muscle necessary to improve their territories' economic performance (MARSHALL
5 AND FINCH 2006; NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT NETWORK. 2005). Nonetheless, the structures
6 of regional governance and the interlocking policy issues associated with regional
7 economies, housing, spatial planning and transport remain. Local authorities are unable to
8 tackle these strategic needs and, as Hazell (2006, p. 49) asserts, 'city regions are essentially
9 technocratic, of interest to élites not ordinary people, and at best a patchwork solution'. It
10 would also be a retrograde step for RDAs or GOs to be granted additional powers and
11 resources without a guarantee of supervision by elected representatives and their non-local
12 authority partners. As Bradbury and Mitchell (2005, p. 300) claim,

13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185
186
187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295
296
297
298
299
300
301
302
303
304
305
306
307
308
309
310
311
312
313
314
315
316
317
318
319
320
321
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365
366
367
368
369
370
371
372
373
374
375
376
377
378
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390
391
392
393
394
395
396
397
398
399
400
401
402
403
404
405
406
407
408
409
410
411
412
413
414
415
416
417
418
419
420
421
422
423
424
425
426
427
428
429
430
431
432
433
434
435
436
437
438
439
440
441
442
443
444
445
446
447
448
449
450
451
452
453
454
455
456
457
458
459
460
461
462
463
464
465
466
467
468
469
470
471
472
473
474
475
476
477
478
479
480
481
482
483
484
485
486
487
488
489
490
491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567
568
569
570
571
572
573
574
575
576
577
578
579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594
595
596
597
598
599
600
601
602
603
604
605
606
607
608
609
610
611
612
613
614
615
616
617
618
619
620
621
622
623
624
625
626
627
628
629
630
631
632
633
634
635
636
637
638
639
640
641
642
643
644
645
646
647
648
649
650
651
652
653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661
662
663
664
665
666
667
668
669
670
671
672
673
674
675
676
677
678
679
680
681
682
683
684
685
686
687
688
689
690
691
692
693
694
695
696
697
698
699
700
701
702
703
704
705
706
707
708
709
710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763
764
765
766
767
768
769
770
771
772
773
774
775
776
777
778
779
780
781
782
783
784
785
786
787
788
789
790
791
792
793
794
795
796
797
798
799
800
801
802
803
804
805
806
807
808
809
810
811
812
813
814
815
816
817
818
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826
827
828
829
830
831
832
833
834
835
836
837
838
839
840
841
842
843
844
845
846
847
848
849
850
851
852
853
854
855
856
857
858
859
860
861
862
863
864
865
866
867
868
869
870
871
872
873
874
875
876
877
878
879
880
881
882
883
884
885
886
887
888
889
890
891
892
893
894
895
896
897
898
899
900
901
902
903
904
905
906
907
908
909
910
911
912
913
914
915
916
917
918
919
920
921
922
923
924
925
926
927
928
929
930
931
932
933
934
935
936
937
938
939
940
941
942
943
944
945
946
947
948
949
950
951
952
953
954
955
956
957
958
959
960
961
962
963
964
965
966
967
968
969
970
971
972
973
974
975
976
977
978
979
980
981
982
983
984
985
986
987
988
989
990
991
992
993
994
995
996
997
998
999
1000

'Stakeholder Assemblies, RDAs and GOs have become the principal building blocks of
developing government in the regions since 1997' and, so long as 'John Prescott
remains a powerful figure in government, it is likely that the powers of the non-elected
Assemblies will be bolstered'.

Whether these will be sufficient, however, to enable Assemblies to develop their capacities
and augment their popularity to deliver a narrow 'yes' in some future referendum remains
doubtful. Indeed, given the public's antipathy to state restructuring and local government's
dislike of elected regional government, ministers and civil servants will continue to pursue
regional working in those policy areas where there is the least threat to the centre. In these
circumstances the prospects of Assemblies accumulating powers and resources similar to
those enjoyed by the UK's devolved institutions, appear distant.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank two referees for their very helpful
comments and suggestions. The article is based upon research into 'Emerging patterns of
governance in the English regions' funded through the Economic and Social Research
Council's Devolution and Constitutional Change Programme (Project No. L21952113). It

1
2
3 draws on interviews with officials in each Regional Assembly, Government Regional
4 Office, Regional Development Agency, representatives of regional business and voluntary
5 interests and Whitehall officials. All interviews were undertaken under Chatham House
6 Rules.
7
8
9
10
11

12 REFERENCES

13
14
15
16 ADVANTAGE WEST MIDLANDS and EAST MIDLANDS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
17
18 (2005) *Smart Growth the Midlands Way. Consultation Document*. East Midlands
19
20 Development Agency, Nottingham.
21

22
23
24 AYRES S. and PEARCE G. (2004a) Central government responses to governance change
25
26 in the English regions, *Journal of Regional and Federal Studies* **14**, 255-281.
27

28
29 AYRES S. and PEARCE G. (2004b) *Rural strategies, frameworks and policies*. West
30
31 Midlands Regional Assembly, Birmingham.
32

33
34 BACHE I. and FLINDERS M. (2004) Multi-level governance and British politics, in
35
36 BACHE, I. and FLINDERS, M. (Eds.) *Multi-level governance*, pp. 93-106. Oxford
37
38 University Press, Oxford.
39

40
41 BENNEWORTH P. and TOMANEY J. (2002) Regionalism in North East England, in
42
43 TOMANEY, J. and MAWSON, J. (Eds.) *England: the State of the Regions*, pp. 137-146.
44
45 Policy Press, Bristol.
46
47

48
49 BOGNADOR V. (Ed.) (2005) *Joined-up government*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
50

51
52 BRADBURY J and MITCHELL J. (2005) Devolution: Between governance and territorial
53
54 politics, *Parliamentary Affairs* **58**, 287-302.
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 BURCH M. and GOMEZ R. (2002) *The English regions and European initiatives*.
4
5 Devolution and European Union Policy Making Series, Paper No. 4, Department of
6
7 Government, University of Manchester, Manchester.
8
9

10
11 BURCH M. and HOLLIDAY I. (1993) Institutional emergence: The case of the North
12
13 West region of England, *Regional Policy and Politics* 3, 29-50.
14

15
16 CABINET OFFICE and DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT
17
18 AND THE REGIONS (2002) *Your region, your choice: Revitalizing the English regions*.
19
20 Stationery Office, London.
21
22

23
24 DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT (2004) *Evaluation of experimental Regional*
25
26 *Transport Boards*. Department for Transport, London.
27
28

29
30 DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS
31
32 (2001) *Planning: Delivering a fundamental change*. Department for Transport, Local
33
34 Government and the Regions, London.
35

36
37 DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS (2001)
38
39 *Strengthening regional accountability: Consultation paper*. Department of the
40
41 Environment, Transport and the Regions, London.
42
43

44
45 EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (2005) England's East Midlands Integrated
46
47 Regional Strategy: Our Sustainable Development Framework. East Midlands Regional
48
49 Assembly, Melton Mowbray.
50

51
52 EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (2004) *The East of England Plan: Draft*
53
54 *Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England*. Regional Planning Panel and Secretariat,
55
56 5th November, Eastern Regional Assembly, Bury St Edmunds.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 GOODWIN M., JONES M. and JONES R. (2005) Devolution, constitutional change and
4 economic development: Explaining and understanding the new institutional geographies of
5 the British state, *Regional Studies* **39**, 421-436.
6
7

8
9
10 HAUGHTON G. and COUNSELL D. (2004) *Regions, spatial strategies and sustainable*
11 *development*. Routledge, London.
12
13

14
15 HAZELL R. (2006) The English Question, *Publius* **36**, 37-56.
16
17

18
19 HM TREASURY (2003) *Spending review 2004: Regional Emphasis Documents*. Letter to
20 Government Regional Offices, Regional Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies,
21 HM Treasury, London.
22
23

24
25 HM TREASURY (2004) *2004 Spending review: Meeting regional priorities*. Stationery
26 Office, London
27
28

29
30 HM TREASURY, DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT, DEPARTMENT OF TRADE
31 AND INDUSTRY and OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (2005) *Regional*
32 *funding allocations: Guidance on preparing advice*. Stationery Office, London.
33
34

35
36 JEFFERY C. (2006) Devolution and local government, *Publius* **36**, 57-73.
37
38

39
40 JEFFERY C. and REILLY A. (2004) *Funding Regional Assemblies: Issues and challenges*.
41 Report for the English Regions Network, University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
42
43

44
45 JOHN P., MUSSON S. and TICKELL A. (2002) 'England's problem region: Regionalism
46 in the South East', *Regional Studies* **36**, 733-741.
47
48

49
50 MARINETTO M. (2003) Governing beyond the centre: A critique of the Anglo-
51 Governance School, *Political Studies* **51**, 592-608.
52
53

54
55 MARSHALL A. and FINCH D. (2006) *City leadership: Giving city-regions the power to*
56 *grow*. Institute of Public Policy Research, London.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 MARSHALL J., BRADLEY D., HODGSON C. and RICHARDSON R. (2005) Relocation,
4 relocation, relocation: Assessing the case for public sector dispersal, *Regional Studies* 39,
5
6 767-787.
7
8

9
10 MAWSON J. and SNAPE S. (2004) *The Chapter 2 agenda and Regional Assemblies, Part*
11
12 *II: The Whitehall View*. Institute of Governance and Public Management, Warwick
13
14 University, Coventry.
15

16
17
18 MUSSON S. TICKELL A. and JOHN P. (2005) A decade of decentralization? Assessing
19
20 the role of the Government Offices for the English regions, *Environment and Planning A*
21
22 37, 1395-1412.
23
24

25
26 NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT NETWORK (2005) *Seeing the Light*. New Local
27
28 Government Network, London.
29

30
31 NORTHERN WAY STEERING GROUP (2004) *Moving forward: The Northern Way:*
32
33 *First growth strategy report sustainable communities*. One North East, Newcastle on Tyne.
34

35
36 OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (2002) *Sustainable Communities:*
37
38 *Delivering through Planning*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London.
39

40
41 OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (2004a) *Planning Policy Statement 11:*
42
43 *Regional Spatial Strategies*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London.
44

45
46 OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. (2004b) *Housing and planning in the*
47
48 *regions*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London.
49

50
51
52 PEARCE G., AYRES, S. and TRICKER M. (2005) Decentralization and devolution to the
53
54 English regions: Assessing the implications for rural policy and delivery, *Journal of Rural*
55
56 *Studies* 21, 197-212.
57

58
59
60 PIERRE J. and PETERS G. (2000) *Governance, politics and the state*. Macmillan, London.

1
2
3 REGIONAL CO-ORDINATION UNIT (2003) *2002-3 Report on the work of the*
4
5
6 *Government Offices for the Regions*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London.

7
8
9 RHODES R. A. W. (1997) *Understanding governance: policy networks, governance and*
10
11 *accountability*. Open University Press, Buckingham.

12
13
14 ROBERTS P., THOMAS K. and WILLIAMS G. (1999) *Metropolitan planning in Britain:*
15
16 *A comparative study*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

17
18
19 SANDFORD M. (2005) *Devolution is a process not a policy: The new governance of the*
20
21 *English regions*. Briefing No 18, Economic and Social Research Council, Devolution and
22
23
24 Constitutional Change Programme, Edinburgh.

25
26
27 SKELCHER C. (2000) Changing images of the state: overloaded, hollowed-out and
28
29 congested, *Public Policy and Administration* **15**, 3-19.

30
31
32 SNAPE S., ASHWORTH R. AULAKH S. DOBBS L. and MOORE C. (2003) *The*
33
34 *development of regional scrutiny: Final report*, Institute of Governance and Public
35
36
37 Management, Warwick University, Coventry.

38
39
40 SOUTH EAST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (2004) *Report of the Chairman of the Regional*
41
42 *Planning Committee*. 29 November, South East Regional Assembly, Guildford.

43
44
45 SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (2004) *Just Connect*. South West Regional
46
47
48 Assembly, Taunton.

49
50
51 WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (2004) *West Midlands Regional Assembly*
52
53 *Business Plan, 2004-06*. West Midlands Regional Assembly, Birmingham.

54
55
56 WHILE A. (2000) Accountability, and regional governance: The emerging role of regional
57
58
59 chambers in England, *Local Economy* **14**, 329-345.
60

1
2
3 YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (1998) *Yorkshire and*
4
5 *Humberside: Advancing together into the millenium: A strategic framework.* Yorkshire and
6
7 Humber Regional Assembly, Wakefield.
8
9

10
11 YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (2004) *Advancing together.*
12
13 Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly, Wakefield.
14

15
16 28.2.06
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For Peer Review Only

Table 1. *Regional Assemblies: Membership categories, 2004*

Region	Population (million)	Number of local authorities	Total Assembly membership	Local authority members	Economic and social partner members	Others
East of England	5.4	54	107	75	32	
East Midlands	4.2	46	111	70	35	Six MEPs One MP, one MEP and one representative of parish/ town councils
North East	2.5	25	72	47	22	
North West	6.9	46	80	56	24	
South East	8.1	74	111	74	34	Three representatives of parish/town councils Two National Park representatives and two representatives of parish/town councils
South West	4.9	51	117	79	34	
West Midlands	5.2	38	100	68	32	
Yorkshire/ Humber	5.0	22	37	22	15	
Totals	42.2	356	735	491	228	16
Averages	5.3	44.5	91.9	61.4	28.5	2.0

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Table 2. Regional partnerships in the West Midlands

Planning Partnership – Assembly & West Midlands Local Government Association funded.
Planning Executive – Assembly funded.
Transport Partnership – Assembly & West Midlands RDA funded.
Housing Partnership – Assembly & West Midlands Local Government Association funded.
European and International Partnership – Assembly & West Midlands RDA funded.
Cultural Partnership (Regional Cultural Consortium) – DCMS funded.
Rural Partnership (Regional Rural Affairs Forum) – Assembly & DEFRA funded.
Health Partnership – Assembly & GO funded.
Environment Partnership – Assembly & Environment Agency funded.
Social Inclusion Partnership – Assembly funded.
Regional Skills Partnership - West Midlands RDA & DfES funded.

Source: West Midlands Regional Assembly, 2004

Table 3. Regional Assemblies income 2004-05 (£ million)

Region	Total income ¹	Total ODPM income ²	Planning Delivery Grant	Chamber Fund	Regional Planning Grant	Subscriptions ³	Other	Source of subscription, other income ⁴
East of England	3.0	1.9	0.5	0.6	0.8	1.1	< 0.1	Local authorities and other partners
East Midlands	2.1	2.1	0.8	0.6	0.7	Nil	< 0.1	Nil
North East	3.5	1.4	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.9	1.2	Local authorities
North West	4.6	2.6	1.1	0.6	0.9	0.6	1.4	Local authorities, EU
South East	4.0	3.3	1.7	0.6	1.0	0.7	< 0.1	Local authorities
South West	4.8	2.1	0.7	0.6	0.9	0.7	2.0	Local authorities, Trade Union, course and consultancy fees
West Midlands	2.4	2.1	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.3	< 0.1	Local authorities, RDA, ERN, Sustainability West
Yorkshire/Humber	4.0	1.9	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.5	0.6	Local authorities
Totals	28.4	17.4	6.4	4.8	6.2	5.8	5.2	

Based on Jeffery and Reilly, 2004

- Notes:
1. Total income is made up of ODPM income plus all other income.
 2. Total of Chambers Fund, Regional Planning Grant and Planning Delivery Grant.
 3. Subscriptions from local authorities and grants from national bodies and other partners.
 4. Other income includes revenue from training enterprises, interest from investments, consultant fees, publications and transfers from other regional bodies.