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4 **Beyond the territorial fix: regional assemblages, politics and power**  
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## Abstract

The idea of regions as territorially fixed in some vital political sense is a stubborn conception, one that is both mobilized to pursue selective interests and to establish regional identities. To assert that regions are political constructs, however, is not to say that such bounded, territorial entities enclose all the political relations which produce them. This paper puts forward a relational view of the region based upon an assemblage of political actors, some public, some private, where elements of central and local government are 'lodged' within the region, not acting above or below it. Using examples drawn from governing agencies across and beyond the south East of England, we show how a more diffuse form of governance has given rise to a spatially discontinuous region. This is grounded in an exposition of the political assemblage that is Milton Keynes today, with its provisional, cross-cutting mix of institutional agencies, partnerships, businesses and interest groupings engaged in a 'politics of scale' exercise to fix the region.

## Key Words

region, assemblages, power, politics, governance, networks

## JEL codes:

R50 - Regional Government Analysis R58 - Regional Development Policy

## Introduction

In *Rethinking the Region* (ALLEN *et al*, 1998), we (and Doreen Massey) were at pains to stress that regions are ‘a series of open, discontinuous spaces constituted by the social relationships which stretch across them in a variety of ways’ (p. 5). They are formed out of a nexus of relations and connections, much of which takes its shape from elsewhere. In today’s language, regions are a product of networked flows and relations fixed in a more or less provisional manner. Our concern was to show the South East of England as a neo-liberal heartland, the product of overlapping social, political and economic relations which stretched across space in ways that showed little or no respect for the regional boundaries imposed upon them. Massey has gone on to emphasise the importance of understanding ‘space as an open and ongoing production’ (MASSEY, 2005, p. 55), rather than trying to capture it as some fixed expression of territory. This relational approach is consistent with a number of other attempts to capture the uncertain ways in which regions are created and recreated through networked social relationships (see, for example, AMIN, 2004, PAASI, 2001).

Yet such attempts have clearly not dispelled the doubts and suspicions that the case against a vision of bounded, territorially fixed regions has been exaggerated (see JONES and MACLEOD, 2004). Perhaps understandably, the urge to draw lines around spatial regions, to know the limits of political authority, is one that is not easy to stifle. It does, after all, chime with many everyday political practices in a way that the symbolism of a more diffuse, somewhat nebulous, regionalism does not. Indeed, we were only too aware that our conceptualization of the region sat uneasily with attempts to define or understand regions through clusters of connected economic activities – as pre-existing ‘crucibles’ of growth (WARD and JONAS, 2004 explore similar issues). We were also markedly conscious that it fits still more uneasily with visions of regions as territorially bounded

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2  
3 *political* constructions through which traditional forms of electoral accountability can be  
4  
5 delivered. Much of our argument, it has to be said, was couched in economic terms –  
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7 growth mechanisms, neo-liberal market forces, and such – which fit well with the  
8  
9 language of network and flows. Rightly or wrongly, however, political institutions, lend  
10  
11 themselves to the language of territory, fixity and boundaries. They evoke a sense of  
12  
13 embeddedness in their performance and practice, one that is echoed in recent discussions  
14  
15 about the potential of regional politics (where the drive to elected assemblies in England  
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17 – mimicking the ‘regional’ structures of Europe, Germany, Spain and maybe even French  
18  
19 decentralisation – nonetheless ended in failure for the regional agenda when the North  
20  
21 East of England voted against such an assembly) (see RALLINGS and THRASHER,  
22  
23 2006).

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29 Even with the onset of a more pluralist governance discourse and the wider range of  
30  
31 institutional actors that such a shift entails, we would argue that the territorial focus has  
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33 remained much the same, despite a more flexible spatial vocabulary that speaks about  
34  
35 regionalisation and the re-scaling of the state. While a focus on territoriality may not  
36  
37 necessarily imply the existence of fixed and stable boundaries (see, e.g., MORGAN,  
38  
39 2002) in many respects the vocabulary has remained trapped within a framework that  
40  
41 attempts to identify new territorial settlements, even if the size and nature of the  
42  
43 territories has changed, from neighbourhoods – and parishes – to city-regions and beyond,  
44  
45 with some suggesting that city-regions may provide the basis for a new territorial political  
46  
47 fix, albeit with ‘fuzzy’ boundaries and through the building of ‘coalitions for change’  
48  
49 rather than the creation of new institutions through structural reform (HARDING *et al*,  
50  
51 2006, p.37). The British government’s White Paper on local government published in  
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53 2006 similarly celebrates the existence of city-regions while offering little in practical  
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55 terms beyond support for ‘multi-area agreements’ between local councils  
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3 (DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 2006). Even if  
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5 it is recognised that no particular scale currently has ‘primacy’, there seems to be an  
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7 expectation that this is just a transitory phenomenon (see, e.g. JESSOP, 2006a).  
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10 It would seem that the language of territorial politics is not only stubborn, but equally  
11  
12 that it cannot simply be wished away by some conceptual wand, since it is itself a  
13  
14 powerful political construction (HUDSON, 2006; JONES and MACLEOD, 2004;  
15  
16 PAASI, 2002, 2004). Assemblies, regional development agencies, and the like, are  
17  
18 performed as territorial entities which try to hold down the fluid elements of global life in  
19  
20 the general interest of their ‘regions’ – seeking to generate fixity ‘through processes of  
21  
22 government and governance’ (GOODWIN *et al*, 2005, p. 423). Regional political  
23  
24 institutions define themselves in relation to ‘other regions’, both in order to compete for  
25  
26 public funds and to give them an identity around which it is possible to mobilise other  
27  
28 forms of support. In doing so, they represent themselves as coherent, collaborative  
29  
30 entities which have to compete and learn. But, and this is to acknowledge the point, the  
31  
32 outcome is always a political construction. The diverse ways in which the ‘coherence’ of  
33  
34 a region is constructed and acted upon by different, and often new, political actors is the  
35  
36 result of a complex set of political mobilisations at any one point in time (constructing  
37  
38 regions as ‘imagined communities’) (KEATING *et al*, 2003). In short, as we stressed in  
39  
40 our account of the South East of England as a neo-liberal growth region, the invention  
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42 and re-invention of regions is a constant.  
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50 What appears to be less well understood, however, is that in the current political  
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52 moment regions are being remade in ways that directly undermine the idea of a region as  
53  
54 a meaningful territorial entity. As we see it, the governance of regions, and its spatiality,  
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56 now works through a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their  
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58 shape from the networks of relations that stretch across and beyond given regional  
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3 boundaries. The agencies, the partnerships, the political intermediaries, and the  
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5 associations and connections that bring them together, increasingly form 'regional' spatial  
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7 assemblages that are not exclusively regional, but bring together elements of central,  
8  
9 regional and local institutions. In the process, we believe that a more fluid set of regional  
10  
11 political relationships and power-plays has emerged which call into question the  
12  
13 usefulness of continuing to represent regions politically as territorially *fixed* in any  
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15 essential sense.  
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20 In the first part of the paper, we restate our sense of regions, and specifically the  
21  
22 South East of England, as relational yet interdependent spaces which are open to  
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24 reinvention as politically meaningful spatial entities. In particular, we try to show how, of  
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26 late, a set of governing agencies across and beyond the South East have mobilized around  
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28 a more discontinuous definition of 'the region' to secure their political and economic  
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30 agendas. Following that, we address some of the more recent networked governance  
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32 structures that have been put in place, both regionally and nationally, and the role played  
33  
34 by political and business intermediaries who 'run' the networks by brokering connections,  
35  
36 'transferring' policies and, more generally, mobilizing interdependencies. Tangled and  
37  
38 cross-cutting in their relationships, the actions of these 'regional elites' or, perhaps more  
39  
40 accurately, quasi-elites, arguably underpin much of what passes as 'multi-level  
41  
42 governance' and would perhaps be better captured by the mix of distanced and  
43  
44 proximate actions that constitute more recent forms of networked regional governance. In  
45  
46 the third section, we attempt to illustrate the complex spatiality of contemporary  
47  
48 governance structures through the networked mobilizations that have reinvented the  
49  
50 'regional' politics of Milton Keynes since the 1990s. More pointedly, we hope to show  
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52 that regional politics no less than regional economies may be seen to take their shape  
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3 from the open, discontinuous spaces that we call 'the region'. Finally, we draw out some  
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5 of the implications of this view for what may be termed 'regional' assemblages of power.  
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### 8 9 **The reinvention of the South-East of England**

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11 Elsewhere we have forcefully argued that, in the 1980s and 1990s, the 'South East'  
12  
13 was best understood as a 'growth' region and specifically a region of neo-liberal growth  
14  
15 (ALLEN *et al*, 1998). Its national dominance was expressed through this understanding  
16  
17 which reflected a particular confluence of political, cultural and economic dynamics (see  
18  
19 also, AMIN *et al*, 2003). Although the South East was presented as a model of  
20  
21 deregulated growth, in practice it relied on a high degree of state intervention, both to  
22  
23 achieve particular forms of 'deregulation' which tended to advantage the South East and  
24  
25 to deliver significant investment in large scale infrastructure (for example, investments  
26  
27 associated with road construction, from by-passes to the M25, the outer circular road  
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29 around London). In other words, if this was a 'neo-liberal' region it was not some sort of  
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31 inevitable outcome of inexorable global market forces but was rather the product of a  
32  
33 clearly articulated state strategy, which was underpinned by substantial investment in  
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35 social, as well as economic, infrastructure. In this discussion, it is important to restate that  
36  
37 the 'South East' with which we are concerned is not limited to the government region';  
38  
39 that is, the 'region' of the regional assembly, the government office or the regional  
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41 development agency. We continue to approach the South East through its status as a  
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43 growth region and the cross-cutting social and political, as well as economic, dynamics  
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45 associated with that understanding. This means not only that it stretches far beyond the  
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47 'standard' region for some forms of economic and cultural relationships (for example it  
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49 reaches to Cambridge through the threads connected to the high technology industries and  
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51 likewise is pulled towards Wiltshire by the strands of the luxury – 'country' – housing  
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53 market, as well as embracing the M4 corridor), but also that there are substantial spatio-  
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3 social discontinuities within it – holes and hot spots (the holes represented by many of the  
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5 cities and towns on the coastal fringe, such as Hastings and the Isle of Wight, as well as  
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7 the old mining areas of North Kent, the legacies of Fordism such as Slough and Luton,  
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9 and the hot spots represented by Gatwick airport, developments around Heathrow, the  
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11 Western ‘edge’ and the new town of Milton Keynes).  
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15 From this perspective, the region itself is territorially discontinuous, in the sense that  
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17 some places officially defined as being in the South East turn out not to be (for example,  
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19 much of Kent and the coastal South, see also ROBSON *et al*, 2006) while other places  
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21 located far away from the accredited borders of the region should be seen as part of it,  
22  
23 precisely because they are so tightly connected through dense networks of economic and  
24  
25 cultural relations. Such a claim is perhaps less contentious these days as material  
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27 developments have prompted reflections which focus on the identification of a ‘Greater  
28  
29 South East’. In some respects, our interpretation of the region is consistent with the  
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31 approach adopted by GORDON (2003, 2004), who has argued strongly for the  
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33 identification of a ‘greater’ South East as a super region, as ‘a regionalized version of  
34  
35 London’ (GORDON 2004, p 41). In a similar vein, drawing on evidence from the 2001  
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37 Census DORLING and THOMAS (2004) have sought to reinterpret the South East as a  
38  
39 newly emergent metropolis, while HALL *et al* (2006) have identified it as a global  
40  
41 ‘polycentric metropolis’ or ‘polycentric mega-region’ – a polycentric urban system.  
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43 Although BUCK *et al* (2002) are primarily concerned with London, they, too, confirm  
44  
45 that the economic strengths of the metropolitan region are associated with the region’s  
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47 fringes as much as its core. There is, of course, still a danger in all this that the task is  
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49 defined as being to identify some new, more or less fixed, set of boundaries for this  
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51 emergent region and we remain sceptical of any such attempts, even as the boundaries are  
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53 shifted ever further outwards.  
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More significant, to our mind, is the fact that the limitations of the official region are not merely of theoretical concern, but are also reflected in the practical challenges faced by regional institutions and their parent organisations across and beyond the South East. The fundamental problem of seeking to contain dynamic growth in formal structures of territorial governance, for instance, is reflected in recent plans for ‘sustainable communities’ which, in turn, have led to the identification of ‘sub-regions’ that cut across official regional boundaries. Strategies have been developed for growth sub-regions in Ashford, the Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes and the South Midlands, and the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough corridor (OPDM, 2003; ODPM, 2004). In practice, however, only Ashford, can be contained within the official region and its linkages are predominately into Europe. The Thames Gateway incorporates parts of the South East, the East of England and London; Milton Keynes and the South Midlands stretches across the South East, the East of England; London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough reaches across London and the East of England. Even the documents produced within the frame of the official regionalism increasingly acknowledge the significance of what they call the Greater South East (see, for example, SEEDA 2006, p.8) or what is (more dismissively it seems) labelled a super-region by those seeking to foster development in the city-regions clustered around England’s ‘core cities’ beyond the reach of London (see, for example, MARVIN *et al* 2006, pp. 44-5).

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Indeed, MARVIN *et al* (2006) argue that the current position is one in which there is an ‘implicit’ regional strategy which tends to benefit the so-called ‘London super-region’. The main drivers of this unspoken strategy are identified as responses to ‘market failure’, which are specifically expressed in initiatives such as the Sustainable Communities Plan and associated with infrastructural investment intended to ensure that there is sufficient ‘affordable’ housing for key workers in the region (see, e.g., RACO, 2006). Moreover,

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3 'place blind' investments in key areas such as higher education and research tend  
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5 apparently to favour the region because of its concentration of elite knowledge based  
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7 institutions, as do investments which reflect London's special national status (most  
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9 recently expressed in those associated with the 2012 Olympics, but also apparent, for  
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11 example, in airport investment). Even before the arrival of the Olympics, the scale of the  
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13 investment in 'sustainable development' promised for the Thames Gateway far  
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15 outstripped anything promised for any of England's other urban areas (RACO, 2005).  
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20 Yet, to all intents and purposes, what such reflections add up to is an attempt to  
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22 'contain' the sprawling effects of growth within larger bounded regions, whether labelled  
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24 'great' or 'super' in style.  
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27 Somewhat paradoxically, however, the new – more explicitly – regionalised  
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29 structures that have emerged in England over the last ten years have actually served to  
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31 strengthen the South East's position, precisely because of the way that regional actors  
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33 have re-imagined themselves as players within this changing settlement. Politically  
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35 motivated definitions of the region have consolidated around a new, more or less  
36  
37 bounded, vision of the South East and its 'sub-regions'. For the first time it would seem,  
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39 the South East has had to be actively constructed as a 'region', rather than simply be the  
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41 place through which the nation is defined (see, for example, AMIN *et al*, 2003,  
42  
43 COCHRANE, 2006a, b). The regionalisation of the South East – its re-imagination as a  
44  
45 region – has opened up spaces for new policy actors and has also, in effect, led to the  
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47 'region' playing a rather different role within the policy imaginary that constitutes the  
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49 UK. Nationally, the South East is constructed as a key driver of economic success; within  
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51 the EU it is repositioned as a metropolitan region under pressure to maintain and improve  
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53 its competitive position and specifically to transform itself into a knowledge economy;  
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55 globally, of course, it is presented as facing dramatic challenges from the newly emergent  
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3 city regions of Pacific Asia (see COCHRANE, 2006a). Just as some regions have been  
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5 recast as underperforming and so in need of renewal, so the South East is increasingly  
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7 presented as the model for the rest (PIKE *et al*, 2006b, FOTHERGILL, 2005).  
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10 In this context, the political driving force of the new regionalism is clear. The strap-  
11 line of the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA) promises that it is  
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13 ‘Working for England’s World Class Region’, yet also emphasises that the South East is  
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15 the ‘driving force of the UK’s economy’ or the ‘powerhouse of the UK economy’ (see  
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17 also, MUSSON *et al* 2002, SEEDA 1999, 2002a, b). In other words, the drive to regional  
18  
19 competitiveness is identified as a British as well as a global imperative. Likewise, the aim  
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21 of the South East’s Regional Economic Strategy for 2002 -2012 is to ensure that the  
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23 region is acknowledged to be one of the fifteen ‘top performing regional economies’ in  
24  
25 the world (SEEDA, 2002b, p. 8) and if it fails to claim its rightful place among Europe’s  
26  
27 elite regions then, it is implied, the UK (and the UK’s other regions, cities and devolved  
28  
29 nations) will also suffer. The most recent Regional Economic Strategy is perhaps  
30  
31 somewhat less confident about the position of the South East, identifying it as one of the  
32  
33 ‘most prosperous regions globally’, but performing relatively weakly against them and  
34  
35 facing a series of challenges (SEEDA, 2006, pp 7-8, 21-28). Nevertheless, the overall  
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37 vision remains upbeat – to ensure ‘that the South East will be a world class region  
38  
39 achieving sustainable prosperity’ (SEEDA, 2006, p.29).  
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48 What this amounts to, in our view, is that the South East, or rather its governing  
49 agencies, have learnt to mobilise the language of regionalism in order to justify an active  
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51 growth politics, albeit one suitably moderated to incorporate the demands of  
52  
53 sustainability, itself mobilised politically by residents keen to preserve the amenities of  
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55 the Home Counties. This is a political process through which differences are negotiated  
56  
57 without ever being made explicit or subject to open political challenge. In this context,  
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3 the South East's county councils sponsored the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR)  
4  
5 to undertake a Commission on Sustainable Development in the region with an agenda  
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7 focused not only on the maintenance of regional prosperity, but also on the enhancement  
8  
9 of its environment and the improvement of the quality of life of its residents. The  
10  
11 significance of this initiative is that it provides political weight aimed at moderating the  
12  
13 impact of the growth agenda – a means of avoiding accusations of 'nimbyism' by  
14  
15 mobilising environmental and other arguments (see, for example, FOLEY, 2004, EVERY  
16  
17 and FOLEY, 2005, COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, 2005).  
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19 Similar concerns have found their way into the more formal language of the Integrated  
20  
21 Regional Framework prepared on behalf of South East Regional Assembly (SEERA) and  
22  
23 a range of other agencies, including the Government Office of the South East (GOSE),  
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25 SEEDA, the Environment Agency and the Department of Health (see SEERA *et al*,  
26  
27 2004).  
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34 Above all, this has involved a process of negotiation between government and  
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36 regionally based agencies which, in the process of mobilizing around spatial  
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38 approximations of the region to steer decisions in their favour, distend and distort the  
39  
40 geographies of the South East to suit their own political ends. In doing so, however, they  
41  
42 seem to deny the territorially discontinuous nature of the regional inventions, which they  
43  
44 themselves perform and operate through. Ironically, this perhaps can itself be seen as the  
45  
46 product of newly emerged regional governance structures that have led to, and indeed  
47  
48 reflect, more tangled arrangements of power.  
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### 53 **New political arrangements**

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56 SANDFORD (2005) is persuasive in suggesting that the new regional governance  
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58 institutions in England have, in a relatively short time period, become a taken for granted  
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60 feature of sub-national governance throughout the country and not just in the traditional

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3 'regions', those which have been identified as 'distressed areas' since the 1930s. While  
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5 there has clearly not been a devolution of political authority along the same lines as in  
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7 Scotland or Wales, what is emerging elsewhere is a more fragmented collection of  
8  
9 institutions and agencies whose members come together in a series of networked  
10  
11 relationships, fostered through involvement in formal and informal forums. There is, in  
12  
13 Sandford's view, increasing evidence that 'a distinctive *system* of governance is  
14  
15 developing in the English regions' (SANDFORD, 2005, p.2) based around relationships  
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17 of this sort, rather than traditional structures of government. Indeed, he goes on to argue  
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19 that it is possible to identify a series of relatively autonomous institutions *of* the region,  
20  
21 such as regional networks, regional development agencies and regional chambers (made  
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23 up of local authority representatives and representatives of business, the voluntary and  
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25 community sectors), as well as government agencies which are located within its spatial  
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27 remit, yet remain directly responsible to the centre.  
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34 Across the South East of England a range of governance agencies has emerged of  
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36 late, some more explicitly engaged in making up the region and defining their own role  
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38 within it than others, which survive and operate within the context of more diffuse and  
39  
40 fragmented forms of governance. The existing governance structures of the Greater South  
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42 East include an elected assembly and elected mayor in London, regional chambers  
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44 supposedly representing 'stakeholders', three regional development agencies, three  
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46 regionally based central government offices, regional and London-wide local government  
47  
48 associations, and much more. But this fragmentation does not necessarily mean that the  
49  
50 arrangement is politically muddled. On the contrary, the nature of the overlapping and  
51  
52 intersecting sets of formal and informal institutional arrangements helps to ensure that the  
53  
54 broad direction of policy is more or less taken for granted, in a form that JESSOP (2004)  
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56 calls 'metagovernance' yet without the necessity for a 'metagovernment'. Such political  
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3 coherence, however, is not matched by an equivalent regional coherence. It would seem  
4 that a spatial tension has been 'built in' to the new governance arrangements where the  
5 more networked forms jostle with the new territorial imaginaries of the South East.  
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10 In fact, the search for bounded territories, within which electoral accountability may  
11 be constructed or state authority mobilised, has actively understated the emergence of  
12 different sorts of politics and forms of governance. In practice, it has proved impossible  
13 to construct institutional arrangements that can be captured by existing regional  
14 boundaries. This is perhaps most immediately apparent in the creation of a number of  
15 cross-regional planning areas and partnership agencies in the context of the central  
16 government sponsored Sustainable Communities Plan, whose ambition is to deliver  
17 housing on a scale that is capable of underpinning continuing 'regional' and thus national  
18 growth (ODPM 2003). Arrangements in the major growth areas, as noted, stretch across  
19 existing regional boundaries and link together government departments, government  
20 sponsored agencies and new 'partnership' institutions (including a series of so-called  
21 local delivery vehicles), although none of them are fixed or set in their geography. Again,  
22 we are witnessing political relationships and linkages which stretch beyond and cross-cut  
23 the official region's already porous boundaries.  
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43 It is tempting to believe that these emergent arrangements may constitute or provide  
44 spaces of representation for regional elites, but this would be to exaggerate the status of  
45 such elites, as well as implying that we are seeing the creation of a more homogeneous,  
46 regionally based economic and political formation than exists in practice. As JOHN *et al*  
47 (2002, p. 734) confirm, 'elite networks rarely identify with the South East region, nor do  
48 they mobilize behind regional institutions' (see also COCHRANE, 2006b). Instead it may  
49 be better to think of the new political actors as forces operating in a looser, less centred  
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3 system, mobilizing through networks rather than through conventional hierarchical  
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5 arrangements.  
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8         Within this more complex spatiality of governance, professional ‘elites’, including  
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10 the growing band of consultants (not for profit, like the IPPR, as well as private),  
11  
12 increasingly act as intermediaries brokering connections or translating policies between  
13  
14 agencies, to deliver the politics of the day to day by ‘facilitating’ different interests and  
15  
16 activities (SANDFORD, 2005). Less obvious in terms of their role in ‘directing’  
17  
18 operations and more distanced in their relationships than traditional elites, the regional  
19  
20 professionals nonetheless share a similar positioning in the new forms of governance to  
21  
22 facilitators, brokers and policy assemblers (see also the discussion of what he calls the  
23  
24 ‘regional service class’ in LOVERING, 1999). It is this which increasingly gives them  
25  
26 their status as part of the wider governance structures.  
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### 31 32 **Multi-level governance and beyond**

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35         One attempt to capture these new developments draws upon the notion of multi-level  
36  
37 governance, a concept borrowed from political science and, in particular, from debates  
38  
39 generated by the experience of the European Union and, more specifically, the working of  
40  
41 the structural funds (see BACHE and FLINDERS, 2004, HOOGHE and MARKS, 2003,  
42  
43 WARLEIGH, 2006). It implies not only that ‘governments’ exist at a range of different  
44  
45 geographical levels or scales, but also that they are increasingly interdependent and  
46  
47 involved in a continuing process of negotiation across a range of policy fields. The notion  
48  
49 of multi-level governance goes further to suggest that it is not just governments that  
50  
51 matter, but also the relationships between, and the interdependence of, governments and  
52  
53 non-governmental organizations and agencies. This approach seeks to locate the formal  
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55 institutions of government alongside, but also within, more complex forms of networked  
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57 governance.  
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3 In that respect, multi-level governance provides a starting point to think about  
4 emergent forms of regional politics, although its limitations as an explanatory device  
5 quickly reveal themselves. One relates to its continued focus on relationships between  
6 governments; in other words, the significance of governance as a form of governing  
7 within which a range of actors, including but not exclusively governments, may be  
8 engaged, loses its force as the process is reinterpreted as one defined through  
9 intergovernmental relations. Similarly, the continued focus on levels of government  
10 positioned within nested hierarchies and the emphasis on forms of vertical  
11 interdependence tends, as Jessop notes, to underplay the 'tangled and shifting nature of  
12 dominant, nodal, and marginal levels of government in different areas' (JESSOP, 2006b,  
13 p. 151, also 2005). Jessop himself favours the use of the term multi-scalar governance as  
14 an alternative, although some of the same criticisms that he directs at multi-level  
15 governance can be levelled at the alternative if the (geographical) term 'scale' is simply  
16 substituted for the (institutionalist) term 'level', since 'scales' and 'levels' are too often  
17 understood as fixed, rather than relational concepts.

18  
19 It is, however, difficult to avoid the fact that no matter how malleable the concept of  
20 scale has become – even when understood relationally – there is an implicit  
21 hierarchization of space that makes it difficult to entertain the kinds of transverse  
22 connection mobilized by the professional and business elites who configure the new  
23 governance arrangements. Geographical scale, as an ordering concept, is not without its  
24 uses as an indicator of the limits of jurisdictional or administrative spatial authority, but  
25 too often it is overextended in its use to frame processes that exceed or cross cut scalar  
26 boundaries (see BRENNER, 2001; JONAS, 2006; MARSTON *et al*, 2005). At worst,  
27 scale is used to pre-define the boundaries of institutional activity before the political  
28 relationships and connections have been traced and understood. In trying to capture and  
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3 understand something like the development of fast policy transfer, for example, where  
4 ideas are brokered between agencies and institutions in ways that belie regional boundary  
5 markers, a scalar ontology of whatever kind would produce a rather foreshortened version  
6 of events (see, for example, PECK's account of the 'transcalar slipperiness of workfarist  
7 discourses and practices', 2002, p357). Even as the 'region' of the South East is redefined  
8 in policy discourse, the more mediated relationships between different bodies, partners  
9 and organizations multiply the possibilities for political intervention at different moments  
10 and within a range of institutional settings that loosen defined distances and scaled  
11 territories (see ALLEN, 2004).  
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24 This, then, is to recognize that an ongoing 'politics of scale', where politicians and  
25 professionals mobilize around a particular spatial representation of the region and act  
26 upon it, does not mean that the *actual* spatial forms of governance are also contained  
27 within the boundaries of the reinvented region. The two forms of political mobilization  
28 represent quite different kinds of power-play and lead to the possibility of different types  
29 of political opportunity. The belated construction of the 'official' South East as a 'region',  
30 for instance, has opened up a different kind of geographical potential for the region. In the  
31 past, the debate about regional policy has focused on differences in wealth between  
32 regions, but now each region has the task of identifying its own problems of social  
33 exclusion that need to be tackled. This brings with it the possibility of finding new ways  
34 of mobilizing resource through the new machineries of governance. We have already  
35 noted the way in which the most recent SEEDA strategy focuses on the 'challenges' the  
36 region faces, but intraregional inequality has also become a significant focus of attention.  
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38 A sharp contrast is drawn between the region's Western growth belt and its coastal  
39 fringes to the East and South which face problems of decline (in both tourism and other  
40 traditional industries). The old mining areas of north Kent and others with concentrations  
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3 of declining industries, particularly those associated with defence or port activities, are  
4 also identified as suitable cases for policy intervention (see, SEEDA, 2002b, pp12-14). In  
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6 this context, therefore, there is an explicit focus on 'tackling disadvantage' within the  
7  
8 region (as the politics of the regional begging bowl finds an expression even in England's  
9  
10 most prosperous region) at the same time as any discussion of redistribution between  
11  
12 regions is more or less explicitly removed from the agenda (thus making explicit the  
13  
14 implicit national strategy identified by MARVIN *et al*, 2006. See also FOTHERGILL,  
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16 2005).

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22 Were it not for the new machineries of governance, however, such political strategies  
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24 might not have evolved in quite this manner. In the next section, we outline in greater  
25  
26 detail the particular spatial assemblage of governance that has shaped the politics of a key  
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28 site in the overall vision of a 'stretched' South East; namely the recent experience of  
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30 Milton Keynes.  
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### 33 34 **The new politics in practice: the Milton Keynes experience**

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37 Milton Keynes has a place at the centre of the (whether implicit or explicit) national  
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39 regional strategy embedded in the Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, 2003), and it  
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41 has played a similar role in the South East since the late 1960s – as a growth pole even as  
42  
43 other parts of Buckinghamshire resisted growth (see, e.g. BENDIXSON and PLATT,  
44  
45 1998, pp. 1-32, CHARLESWORTH and COCHRANE, 1994, CLAPSON, 2004). The  
46  
47 Sustainable Communities Plan builds on this by identifying a Milton Keynes and South  
48  
49 Midlands sub-region which stretches from Corby in the North to Luton in the South and  
50  
51 from Bedford in the East to Aylesbury in the West. This is a 'sub-region' that cuts across  
52  
53 three sets of official regional boundaries. Milton Keynes (with a current population of  
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55 212,000) is expected to make a substantial contribution to the population growth targets  
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57 for the sub-region, doubling in population to around 400,000 by 2030.  
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8 The context for the development of public policy in Milton Keynes over the next few  
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10 decades is set out in the Sub Regional Strategy for Milton Keynes and the South  
11  
12 Midlands (see GOSE *et al*, 2004) which forms the planning framework for the delivery of  
13  
14 the Sustainable Communities Plan. Formally, the Sub Regional Strategy is being directed  
15  
16 by the Government Offices of the South East, East of England and East Midlands, and an  
17  
18 inter-regional Board, chaired by a Government Minister, has been established to steer it.  
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20 The expectation is also that the three Regional Development Agencies – the South East of  
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22 England Development Agency (SEEDA), the East of England Development Agency  
23  
24 (EEDA) and the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) – will work closely  
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26 together in its implementation, with SEEDA taking specific responsibility for Milton  
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28 Keynes. In other words, the formal ‘regional’ structures are already pretty complex.  
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34 That, however, is just one institutional layer, albeit a most significant one. It is  
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36 overlain on an institutional landscape in Milton Keynes which is littered with partnerships  
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38 of one sort and another. Some of these (such as the Parks Trust and Community  
39  
40 Foundation, the Central Milton Keynes Partnership) are legacies of the new town  
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42 Development Corporation (itself a state sponsored development agency which reached  
43  
44 the end of its life in 1992, but left significant local land holdings in the hands of English  
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46 Partnerships). Others, such as the Milton Keynes Economy and Learning Partnership  
47  
48 (MKELP), a business led partnership organization, and Milton Keynes Local Strategic  
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50 Partnership (MKLSP) which is responsible for preparing Milton Keynes’ own community  
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52 strategy, are the product of more recent political negotiations. The Milton Keynes  
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54 Partnership (MKP) has been set up as a local delivery vehicle for the Sustainable  
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56 Communities Plan, itself absorbing the Central Milton Keynes Partnership (whose task is  
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3 to oversee the remaking and further development of the central shopping and office  
4 district). This is a world in which the rhetoric of ‘community’ and ‘partnership’ is  
5 mobilised unproblematically to produce apparently shared agendas, masking the  
6 possibility of significant conflict over alternative visions of change (see, e.g.,  
7 COCHRANE, 2007, pp. 48-67).  
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15 The division of labour between the various bodies in the field of economic  
16 development is not altogether clear, but can be outlined as follows. MKELP presents  
17 itself as an autonomous agency with a specific remit – namely to ‘promote and develop a  
18 prosperous community, underpinned by a strong economy with employment and learning  
19 opportunities for all’ (MKELP, 2004). It has a small secretariat of its own and is a public-  
20 private partnership, apparently led by the private sector (even if, in practice, its  
21 membership remains dominated by representatives of public sector agencies of one sort or  
22 another). MKELP was responsible for commissioning work on developing an economic  
23 strategy for Milton Keynes, but has also played an important part, with other Economic  
24 Partnerships and the relevant RDAs, in developing yet another sub-regional vision in the  
25 form of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (which is identified, perhaps unsurprisingly with  
26 the help of a set of consultants, as a knowledge economy cluster that cuts across MKSM  
27 from East to West, see, SQW, 2001). MKLSP has been set up along the lines identified in  
28 government guidance (see, DETR, 2001), as the mechanism through which a ‘community  
29 plan’ for the area could be developed, drawing on a wider membership than MKELP,  
30 including representation of community groups and a range of partnerships in social areas  
31 such as housing, transport, health, children and young people, childcare and the  
32 environment. The local authority was a driving force in its formation because of the  
33 perceived need to co-ordinate local strategies – in particular linking different aspects of  
34 employment policies such as training, childcare, housing and transport – but more  
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3 importantly to provide a forum through which the local political agenda could be given  
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5 additional legitimacy. The Local Strategic Partnership was intended to play a major role  
6  
7 in establishing a negotiating position with central government about budgets and local  
8  
9 authority funding settlements (interview with Council Representative on LSP Board,  
10  
11 March 2005) (COCHRANE and ETHERINGTON, 2007).  
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15 If both of these partnerships can be identified as 'local' – the products of negotiations  
16  
17 between local actors, even if both also incorporate representatives of government  
18  
19 agencies, such as English Partnerships, SEEDA, GOSE and the Learning and Skills  
20  
21 Council – then MKP is more clearly the product of a national initiative, in the context of  
22  
23 the Sustainable Communities Plan. It is the 'local delivery vehicle' explicitly tasked with  
24  
25 the responsibility of delivering on the housing targets set by national strategy, filtered  
26  
27 through the sub-regional strategy prepared by GOSE et al (2004) and endorsed by the  
28  
29 Secretary of State. This brings with it the responsibility of co-ordinating the 'development  
30  
31 of land and infrastructure' and using the surplus generated from the increased value of  
32  
33 land to help provide the infrastructure necessary for further development (MKPC, 2004,  
34  
35 p. 27). MKP has development control powers for a designated Urban Development Area.  
36  
37 Formally, there can be little doubt that MKP is located within a hierarchy of government,  
38  
39 as an agency of English Partnerships, which itself is responsible to the Secretary of state  
40  
41 for the Department of Communities and Local Government. However, even this  
42  
43 relationship is not a straightforward one. The Partnership Board includes representatives  
44  
45 of community, business, health (drawn from the MKLSP) and local government as well  
46  
47 as 'independents' appointed by the Secretary of State, alongside representatives of  
48  
49 English Partnerships. For long term residents of Milton Keynes, some of the features of  
50  
51 the new 'partnership' are familiar enough – this is effectively a down-scaled version of  
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53 the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, but one which now has to work in a more  
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3 complex institutional setting than its predecessor since, in some areas, co-operation with  
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5 the Council is essential as it has planning powers of its own.  
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8 The nature of the emergent political regime can be illustrated with the help of two  
9  
10 examples. The first relates to the making of the local community plan and the second to  
11  
12 the processes of negotiation over infrastructural development. The development and  
13  
14 agreement of the Community Strategy through the Local Strategic Partnership (following  
15  
16 a series of visioning events and utilizing a series of consultants, including Halcrow,  
17  
18 Demos and First) was seen as a way of setting an agenda for the Milton Keynes  
19  
20 Partnership as it developed its own strategy and business plan (MKLSP, 2004). Its title  
21  
22 summarises the vision and spells out the urban 'brand', namely that Milton Keynes is *The*  
23  
24 *City that Thinks Differently, Embraces Evolution and Champions Change*. It  
25  
26 incorporates work already undertaken through MKELP to determine an economic vision  
27  
28 for the future. This, too, was undertaken through consultants (this time DTZPIEDA) who  
29  
30 prepared a plan which set out a strategy for moving the city from a 'new town' to an  
31  
32 'international city', seeking to position the newly expanded Milton Keynes as a globally  
33  
34 competitive city by making it a place attractive to globally footloose industry, while also  
35  
36 trying to encourage employers already located in the town to be less footloose  
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38 (DTZPIEDA, 2004).  
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45 The issue here is not whether this is a realistic vision of Milton Keynes' future, but,  
46  
47 rather, how it works as a political framing or reframing. If the new town was originally  
48  
49 envisaged as offering opportunities to those relocating from the 'overcrowded' central  
50  
51 cities, the international city is about bringing the right sort of people to Milton Keynes to  
52  
53 ensure that it is able to grow further and better, changing the nature of the local  
54  
55 population so that it is attractive to employers in the knowledge industries (PIKE *et al*,  
56  
57 2006a, p.72). The role of consultants is central to the process of politics in this new  
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3 context. They are mobilised to construct the agreed agendas (or, to use their own  
4  
5 language, the shared visions) on the basis of which the 'partners' are prepared to operate  
6  
7 and cooperate. They rarely add anything new to the debate but feed back what they have  
8  
9 been told by the various agencies, professionals and elected politicians that they have  
10  
11 consulted, giving it new legitimacy or (if successful) finding ways of shaping consensus.  
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15 The intended audience for this rhetoric is not so much the potential investors and  
16  
17 developers (although, of course, it sets the scene for business oriented boosterism and  
18  
19 attempts to attract outside investors), but those agencies which can be relied on to provide  
20  
21 resources to support such an agenda, in particular the Department for Communities and  
22  
23 Local Government, the Government Office and SEEDA. It is here (echoing points made  
24  
25 by SEERA 2006 at a regional level) that the community strategy has such an important  
26  
27 part to play – setting out the terms on which 'Milton Keynes' is ready to play its part in  
28  
29 achieving the growth targets set by national government – but in the process it is expected  
30  
31 to be supported in this endeavour. It has thus become an important reference point for the  
32  
33 later planning documents and business plans of Milton Keynes Partnership (see, GVA  
34  
35 GRIMLEY *et al*, 2006).  
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41 It is in this context that negotiation over infrastructure is so important. MKP is a  
42  
43 'partnership' in which the lead agency and its priorities are clear, but it too provides an  
44  
45 arena within which negotiation may and does take place, particularly around the provision  
46  
47 of social and other infrastructure required to underpin housing growth (for example,  
48  
49 relating to transport linkages, the provision of health and education, and even investment  
50  
51 in further and higher education). A tariff based system, through which a levy is paid by  
52  
53 developers on each new house to help cover the costs of infrastructural development has  
54  
55 been agreed (MILTON KEYNES PARTNERSHIP, 2006, pp. 43-51). This income is  
56  
57 expected to cover around 75% of capital costs (MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL,  
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3 2006). The emphasis of discussion in a range of partnership meetings involving MKP and  
4  
5 its representatives is on the need for such infrastructure as a prerequisite for growth. In  
6  
7 other words, local state actors, as well as the professionalized representatives of the  
8  
9 business and the voluntary sectors, use the meetings as sites for negotiation over  
10  
11 additional resource. In the year 2004-5, these issues included the need for additional  
12  
13 investment in strategic road building, the need to retain the central station as a stopping  
14  
15 point for Virgin trains, the need for investment in a spur line at the station to make this  
16  
17 possible in the longer term, the need for investment in a face to face teaching (and, if  
18  
19 possible, research) university, the need to invest in the development of the local hospital  
20  
21 and support for a dedicated training centre for building workers associated with the local  
22  
23 further education college (see also MILTON KEYNES PARTNERSHIP, 2006, pp. 29-  
24  
25 33). Of particular significance is the fact that these bodies have an overlapping  
26  
27 membership through which a policy consensus on local development is developed and  
28  
29 reproduced. Institution building in Milton Keynes is focused on constructing policy  
30  
31 networks that facilitate closer links and increased capacities for negotiation between  
32  
33 'Milton Keynes' and central government, in effect constructing hybrid institutions that  
34  
35 can be characterised as neither central, regional or local, nor as public or private. This is a  
36  
37 'Milton Keynes' which may appear bounded in the approach taken by the local council,  
38  
39 but it is also a 'Milton Keynes' that can only be understood as part of the surrounding  
40  
41 sub-region and which – as far as business is concerned (as the private sector chair of  
42  
43 MKELP has made clear on a number of occasions) – should not be constrained by any  
44  
45 territorial boundaries. MKELP provides a direct route through which government  
46  
47 agencies are able to engage with representatives of business and the council, since  
48  
49 English Partnerships (and so MKP), GOSE, Business Link, the Learning and Skills  
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51 Council and SEEDA are all involved alongside the council and a range of other 'local'  
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3 interests. Three members of the MKP board and one of the key English Partnership  
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5 officers working for MKP are members of the MKELP Board. Seven members of  
6  
7 MKELP are also members of MKLSP, one of whom is also a member of MKP, while  
8  
9 another is the English Partnerships officer. GOSE is represented in some form on all three  
10  
11 bodies and SEEDA on two. The cross-cutting memberships of these bodies ensure that  
12  
13 they operate as forums for informal as well as formal negotiation, where understandings  
14  
15 are reached, even when they are not minuted or formally recorded (for example in  
16  
17 discussions that took place prior to the submission of a bid for infrastructural funding  
18  
19 from the Strategic Community Fund managed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
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21 in early 2005).

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27 Whether or not this is a form of regionalised centralism, based around 'shadowy  
28  
29 quasi democratic forms which aim to garner the advantages of networking without  
30  
31 changing the balance of executive power between existing institutions' (SANDFORD,  
32  
33 2005, p. 143) is open to question. A similar understanding has been captured in the notion  
34  
35 of the 'shadow of hierarchy' (SCHARPF, 1994) which suggests that even if the formal  
36  
37 structures of hierarchy have been undermined, the practice of hierarchical authority may  
38  
39 still be played out in the experience of day to day negotiation of regional politics (see,  
40  
41 e.g., WHITEHEAD, 2003 for a discussion of the authority relationships between agencies  
42  
43 involved in urban regeneration in the West Midlands). The danger of such an approach is  
44  
45 that the description of a relationship is translated into what appears to be a structural  
46  
47 explanation (albeit in the form of a 'shadow'). The evidence from Milton Keynes  
48  
49 suggests that while the balance may not be shifting directly and explicitly, the  
50  
51 interdependence of the actors involved makes it difficult for those with formal executive  
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53 powers to achieve their ends without extensive negotiation in which a range of sources of  
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55 power may be mobilised by the actors involved.  
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It is not that the multiplication of actors has simply led to a more complex form of government, but that the greater opportunities for a wider range of professionals and other bodies to mediate the decision-making process and mobilize resources independently of any central authority produces a spatial politics within which it is not always possible to know what particular advantages have been conferred upon actors by the new arrangement. Overlapping sets of political relations, networked across spaces which have little respect either for institutional levels or geographical scales, pushes us to think about a more distanced, politics of 'the region'. In doing so, we might capture more of what is happening politically around our 'regional' institutions than if we try to filter everything through a scalar imagination.

### **'Regional' assemblages of power**

If, as we have argued, we are witnessing the emergence of a more tangled, overlapping set of governance structures across the South East, this also has implications for how we understand the different power-plays that shape the politics of the regions. In an institutional setting where it is increasingly difficult to entertain a simple central versus regional government binary as more networked arrangements disrupt traditional, hierarchical forms of regulation and co-ordination, it becomes harder to pinpoint how governing agencies mobilize to secure, modify or translate their goals. If there are 'regional' institutional assemblages, made up of part-private, part-public agencies, as well as parts of central, regional and local government 'lodged' in spaces which fall within the constructed region, then there are also fragments of state authority, sections of business and any number of partnerships and agencies engaged in a 'politics of scale' to fix resources and stabilize geographical definitions to their advantage.

Increasingly, it would seem that there is little to be gained by talking about regional governance as a territorial arrangement when a number of the political elements

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3 assembled are not particularly regional in any traditional sense, even if they draw on what  
4 might be called the 'spatial grammar' of regionalism. Many are 'parts' of elsewhere,  
5 representatives of professional authority, expertise, skills and interests drawn together to  
6 move forward varied agendas and programmes. The sense in which these are 'regional'  
7 assemblages, rather than geographically tiered hierarchies of decision-making, lies with  
8 the tangle of interactions and capabilities within which power is negotiated and played  
9 out (see ALLEN, 1999). There is, as we have tried to indicate, an *interplay* of forces  
10 where a range of actors mobilize, enrol, translate, channel, broker and bridge in ways that  
11 make different kinds of government possible. Some of this interplay takes place at arms  
12 length, mediated indirectly, some through relations of co-presence in a more distanced  
13 fashion, and other forms of interaction are more direct in style, but together they amount  
14 to a more or less ordered assembly of institutional actors performing the 'region'.  
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31 As we have seen in the case of Milton Keynes, the presence of central government  
32 professionals in the institutional networks allows for the exercise of direct authority over  
33 plans and agendas, rather than relying wholly upon the remote imposition of targets and  
34 benchmarks. This is less government at-a-distance than the skilled negotiation of  
35 parameters, involving inducements that both steer as well as limit development  
36 possibilities. In a context where all authority is negotiated, the wider range of 'local'  
37 political actors does nonetheless open up the prospect of all manner of persuasive, and  
38 potentially manipulative, ploys to skew agendas and steer growth targets in directions that  
39 may not have been fully anticipated by 'national' actors (similar issues are explored by  
40 WHILE *et al*, 2004). The case of consultant agencies, many drawn from much wider  
41 geographical networks, provides but one counter to the political authority of the centre in  
42 the form of technical expertise that enables 'regional' politicians and representatives to  
43 broker a consensus among those who need to be mobilised if a particular course of action  
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3 is to be pursued. Hence the practices of power may be less about the visible machinery of  
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5 decision-making and rather more to do with the displacement of authority, the  
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7 renegotiation of inducements, the manipulation of geographical scales and the  
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9 mobilizations of interests to construct politically meaningful spatial imaginaries.  
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13 Crucially, we are not talking here about a political set of negotiations ‘up and down’  
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15 the vertical scales of government, a ‘rescaling’ of power and responsibility downwards or  
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17 a ‘jumping of scale’ by ‘local’ agencies (see, for example, SWYNGEOUW, 2006), but  
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19 rather an assemblage of central, regional and local actors engaged in a complex set of  
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21 political mobilizations at one point in time. This is not to deny that there is an uneven  
22  
23 institutional balance between different actors. It is clear that some are more dominant  
24  
25 than others by virtue of the financial resources and decision-making powers at their  
26  
27 disposal, whilst others rely more on their ability to mobilize opinion and interests in their  
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29 favour, but all are part and parcel of a ‘regional’ assemblage of political power that is  
30  
31 defined by its practices, not by some predefined scalar arrangement of power. Neither is it  
32  
33 to deny the obvious pressures and constraints that central government agencies can and  
34  
35 do exert over regional and local bodies, nor the role that the national state may play in  
36  
37 sponsoring and supporting the networks that underpin such assemblages (GOODWIN et  
38  
39 al 2005, p. 423). But it is to recognize that such power plays take place within more fluid,  
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41 relational institutional settings than any top-down, territorial arrangement can fully  
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43 convey (see also, HUDSON, 2006).  
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51 All this talk of networked mobilizations across the South East of England does,  
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53 however, sit rather awkwardly with the long held view that power, or certainly the most  
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55 powerful political agencies, are located in the region, more specifically, in London. As the  
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57 seat of political power, the executive site of government, London and the South East  
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59 represents not only the centre of the nation, but also the apex of political decision-making  
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3 as its affects the regions. More often than not this capability is read-off from the  
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6 'concentration' of power that is London and the South East (see for example, AMIN *et al*,  
7  
8 2003). Such capabilities, however, represent latent rather than actual qualities of power;  
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10 they refer to the effective institutional resources and decision-making abilities which can  
11  
12 be marshalled to great effect. Indeed, there is no question as to how effective and  
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14 extensive such capabilities can be and have been over time; they encapsulate all that we  
15  
16 understand by the term, state power. But such territorially embedded assets and resources  
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18 are of less help when it is the actual *practices* of power that we wish to understand, rather  
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20 than the concentration of abilities that lie behind them (see ALLEN, 2003).  
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25 A top-down, centre-out account of central government power is an unhelpful starting  
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27 point for any exploration of the practice of state power. There is a 'how' to power which  
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29 is not satisfactorily answered by assertions of the unproblematic reach or delegation of  
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31 'centralized powers', where power is measured by the size of the territory which contains  
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33 it. In fact, this question is all the more pressing for those who, like us, consider the  
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35 governance of regions to be a predominantly relational affair, where power is a relational  
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37 effect of political interaction, not a bloc of pre-formed decision-making powers or a  
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39 distributed capability. In the foregoing, we have considered central government actors as  
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41 part of 'regional' assemblages, not bodies which sit over or apart from the regions. Their  
42  
43 manoeuvres and negotiations are entangled in regional governance structures, as are the  
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45 effects of their actions, and it is through such relationships that the constraints and  
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47 impositions of 'the centre' are likely to reveal themselves, not from afar like some remote  
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49 authority or historical power bloc.  
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## 54 55 56 **Conclusion**

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58 The purpose of this paper has been to challenge the idea of regions as fixed political  
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60 spaces ordered by scale, but in doing so we are aware that we run the risk of sidelining



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3 the importance of a 'politics of scale', where agencies and institutions mobilize to  
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5 construct a region like the South East. Our argument was not that the South East of  
6  
7 England was simply 'unbounded', but that it, indeed any region, is made and remade by  
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9 political processes which stretch beyond it and impact unevenly. To assert that regions are  
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11 political constructs therefore, is not to suggest that such constructs 'contain' in some way  
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13 the very governance relationship that 'invented' them. It would be wrong to collapse the  
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15 two geographies, one the defined outcome of political endeavours, the other the tangled  
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17 relationships which almost inevitably exceed the boundaries drawn. The likelihood of  
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19 such excess is why we have tried to think through the emergence of a more diffuse and  
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21 fragmented form of governance as a 'regional' assemblage, rather than as a series of  
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23 regional institutions which are territorially fixed in some way.  
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29 It is worth stressing that by this we emphatically do not mean that 'regional' political  
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31 institutions, or parts of them, have been networked in such a way that they no longer have  
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33 a settled presence. We are not arguing that the professional and business elites owe their  
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35 points of attachment to the networks rather than to the regions or that their relationships  
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37 are simply embedded in flows of interaction not the peculiarities of the regional context.  
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39 On the contrary, it is the 'lodging' of a wide range of political actors drawn from the  
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41 national as much as the local domain which gives a regional presence to the new  
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43 governance arrangements. The political assemblage is 'regional' because that is what its  
44  
45 capabilities speak to, not because its authority is defined by territorial parameters. The  
46  
47 precise shape, mix and membership of such assemblages is a contingent affair, as can be  
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49 witnessed across the South East, and their organizational logic is a cross-cutting mix of  
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51 distanced and proximate actions.  
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57 Such arrangements, whilst relatively novel in institutional terms, also raise questions  
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59 about what kind of democratic politics is compatible with them. Some, such as  
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3 ROSENAU (2004), have argued that the new forms of governance generate democratic  
4 possibilities because they open up politics to a much wider range of actors in the form of  
5  
6 an extended pluralism. There is, however, no simple equation between the emergence of  
7  
8 networked forms of governance, on the one hand, and negotiation and pluralism, on the  
9  
10 other (see HADJIMACHALIS and HUDSON, 2006). On the contrary, as our discussion  
11  
12 of the Milton Keynes' experience suggests, these political arrangements are characterised  
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14 by forms of closure in which some are licensed as stakeholders while others are consulted  
15  
16 or only involved at one remove through forms of representation that may not allow for  
17  
18 direct accountability (see also HUMPHREY and SHAW, 2006 for experience in another  
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20 region of England). Alternative forms of democratic accountability, consistent with the  
21  
22 more assembled forms of governance remain elusive.  
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30 Nevertheless, there are some signs which suggest that it is possible to generate new  
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32 forms of engagement, utilising some aspects of the emergent political framework. So, for  
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34 example, SANDFORD (2006) outlines some of the ways in which regional assemblies –  
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36 themselves not directly elected - have sought to position themselves as offering the  
37  
38 possibility of civic engagement. And, as PIKE (2004) notes, there is no simple  
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40 (hegemonic) approach to the management of local and regional economic development,  
41  
42 but rather an overlapping set of policy prescriptions which he characterises as 'orthodox'  
43  
44 and 'heterodox', with 'institutional experimentation' existing alongside a continued  
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46 reliance on professional expertise. As a result, he points to the possibility of opening up  
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48 the process to forms of democratic involvement, based on 'the discussion of context-  
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50 sensitive and progressive alternatives based upon the inevitably messy historical  
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52 evolution of orthodox and heterodox approaches, and the building of a more participatory  
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54 determination of economic development priorities and policies' (PIKE, 2004, p. 2158).  
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So, for example, as we have seen, the counties of the South East were able to move outside the institutional frame to commission a consultancy usually associated with the 'left' to undertake work that allowed them to question the sustainability of the drive to housing development set out in the Sustainable Communities Plan. Similarly Milton Keynes Council (again with the help of consultants) were able to mobilise the Local Strategic Partnership and its related partnerships to construct a vision for development which was intended to provide the starting point for the development planning (and infrastructural investment) to be taken on by Milton Keynes Partnership. These are merely indicative of some of the political possibilities inherent in a world of regional politics which (for good or ill) is not defined through clear-cut, scalar hierarchies of government, even if the options remain constrained by the more diffuse and tangled assemblages of governance. And wider possibilities are also raised by the strategies being developed. The regional politics of development are based around attempts to construct wider visions of change ('from new town to international city' is just one example of the slogans being mobilised to reflect this). In other words, the attempts to move beyond the negotiations about particular initiatives and to set broader ground rules within which they may be pursued also opens up scope for the generation of alternative sets of visions. In doing so, it creates the space for alternative political movements potentially from outside the charmed circle of the regional assemblage, albeit sometimes with leverage within it through existing democratic and popular institutions such as local councils, civic groups, trade unions, social movements and community organisations.

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Figure 1 The Growth Areas