

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

CULTURE AND REGIONAL FORMATION IN SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND



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Abstract

New regionalist writings display a growing tendency to turn towards the role of institutions and culture in the formation of regions. However, the way these are articulated is less than clear. This article calls for a re-combination of culture and institutions in order to analyse the process of regional formation at a micro-level. To do this it employs the concepts of discourse and the everyday to investigate the cultural reproduction of the region in the peak institutions of the new regionalization in the South West of England. In the absence of widespread regional identities in England, such institutions play a major role in constructing and policing the meaning of 'region'. Interview data help to unpack an evolving

regional discourse in south-west England, one that involves the everyday reproduction of representations of the region in the new regional institutions. Underlying this discourse of the region lie some traditional and stereotypical images of the South West. Furthermore, the implications of this reconfiguration of scale are explored in relation to another territorial identity at a lower scale, with reference to the campaign for a Cornish Assembly. The article concludes that the power of regional elites to create regions is overstated by the new regionalism.

KEY WORDS ★ Cornwall ★ culture ★ institutions
★ region ★ scale

The new regionalism, institutions and culture

The new regionalism has attained a preeminent status in the literature on European sub-state governance. However, the constellation of theorization clustering around new regionalism has been subjected to growing criticism from within the field. Taking issue with the economic determinism and global reach of some regionalist analyses (Ohmae, 1995; Scott, 1998), a more nuanced new regionalism has adopted and internalized a range of middle-level concepts and approaches, for instance institutions and the associational economy, culture and the social construction of the market, networks and the learning region (Keating, 1998). At the same time the new regionalist orthodoxy has been accused of blurring the boundary between analysis and advocacy and being insufficiently critical of dominant political narratives, under-theorizing the power relations that lie behind regionalist projects

and underestimating the role of the state (Lovering, 1999; Webb and Collis, 2000). Coupled with this is the critique of its unreflective scripting of the region (Martin, 1999). Regions are treated as pre-given categories, this assumption articulating with an unreflective adoption of neo-liberal economic narratives. Finally, doubts have been raised from within the paradigm that it either under-theorizes culture, over-relying on simplistic and unmeasurable notions of social capital; or succumbs to a vague cultural reductionism (Keating, 2001). In consequence the new regionalism has not yet convincingly articulated culture with governance.

In response, there has been a turn to both institutions and culture. As Keating (2001) points out, 'institutional arrangements matter'. But institutions retain their conceptual separation from culture. Culture tends to be viewed as a resource, as a set of values productive of, or inimical to, regional development. 'Culture is important not so much in itself but in the way it is used' (Keating, 2001: 220).

Institutions can act upon culture and culture may affect behaviour and relationships within the region. What is less apparent from this approach is how institutions are themselves cultural and how culture is implicated in the process of regional formation.

Keating (2001) calls for a more sensitive constructionist approach to regions in order to escape the multiple temptations offered by teleology, functionalism or determinism. This has been taken up by those writing within the 'new regional geography', who call for more diachronic readings of institutional formation and the ideology of place and region underpinning regional governance (MacLeod, 1999). Over a decade ago, Murphy (1991) pointed out that there exists a gap between the theory and practice of regions. The regional context was taken for granted as scholars concentrated on regional attributes to the exclusion of the regionalization process, on the what of regions rather than the how. Paasi (1986; 1991) built upon this insight, using the concept of spatial socialization to produce a model of regional production. Regions appear as the condensation of a 'whole complex of economic, political and social processes into a specific cultural image' (1991: 241). Central to this process is the role of institutionalization, during which regions gain an identity. For Paasi questions of culture and identity intricately interpenetrate issues of regional formation.

MacLeod and Jones (2001) have attempted to 'transcend the straightjacket of "crude" new regionalist discourse and practice' by applying Paasi's model to a case-study of the North of England.¹ Paasi's stages of institutionalization assist them to 'unravel the culturally embedded institutionalisation' of 'the North' and its changing construction in the light of shifting economic, political and cultural pressures. Paasi's model thus provides both a valuable antidote to unreflective accounts of regions as pre-given entities and a framework for conceptualizing the structures within which regions emerge and are established. Nonetheless, this framework, although convincingly identifying the structural parameters of the process, says less about the everyday reproduction of the concepts and symbols of the region. The role of the agents embedded in the regional institutions is left opaque and the precise ways in which ideas of the region become sedimented in everyday life remain unexplored.

Two other theoretical approaches might help us supplement the insights of Paasi and the new regional geography. One approach that combines culture and institutions is historical institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996). This defines institutions widely, as standard operating practices and informal interaction as much as formal organizations and rules. Institutions are thus seen as having a cultural logic; they become 'normative vessels', bearers of scripts and categories for actors both inside and outside formal institutions (March and Olsen, 1984). And not just bearers. 'Institutions create theories about themselves which have, in turn, consequences for the interactions of actors' (Jachtenfuchs, 1997: 47). In this way institutions lock into place and create path dependencies, in the process helping to reproduce representations of the region as an 'imagined community'.

Identifying representations of the 'region' in a specific location moves us towards the analysis of the regional 'discourse'. Thrift (1991) has called for more consideration of the forms of knowledge that are made available through discourse, while MacLeod and Jones (2001: 675) echo this by encouraging 'a deeper appreciation of these contested representations and subjectivities [that] can help us to advance a thorough reconsideration of how regions are formed and are subsequently to develop unevenly'. A discourse is a particular way of understanding the world. However, such a deceptively simple definition has spawned a complex body of discourse theory.

Eschewing the further poststructuralist shores of discourse theory, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis perhaps offers the most relevant entry point for a preliminary investigation of how discourses of the region are being shaped in everyday practice. In this approach discourses are not totally constitutive (cf. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) but have a dialectical relationship with other social practices. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourses both constitute the social world and are constituted by other social practices, thus opening the way to a combination of linguistic-discursive analysis and other processes emanating from the economic and political spheres. Discourses are articulated in a 'communicative event', such as a text or an interview, and inhabit an 'order of discourse', containing those discourses and genres used within a social institution or field.

There are thus three dimensions to discourse: the

text itself, the production and consumption of texts (what Fairclough calls the 'discursive practice'), and the wider social practice which the discourse works to reproduce or restructure (Fairclough, 1992: 73). Thus, once established, a discourse of the region produces a set of assumptions about what can be meaningfully taken as a region and has repercussions for the conduct of people, organizing and regulating social practice, ruling in what is acceptable and ruling out other ways of representing the 'region' (Hall, 1997).

However, discourses do not merely constrain agents. Discourses are never complete or final. Closure is only ever temporary, as sets of meanings remain contingent, always open to new or revised articulations of the elements that comprise them. Every example of language use, every text, carries the potential to change discourses, although, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' access to discourse is limited by the power relations of society. Moreover, different discourses can share the same social field, sometimes providing conflictual configurations of meanings for the same social phenomena revolving around what has been termed 'floating signifiers' (Laclau, 1990: 28). These are signifiers that are central to discourses but also particularly prone to multiple meanings.

Region is one such 'floating signifier'. In England, a top-down process of regionalization is creating a dominant discourse of the region. The creation of a tier of regional bodies in England in the 1990s, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Government Offices (GOs) and Regional Assemblies, produced a strikingly novel location for the reproduction of ideas and discourses about the region. Nevertheless, in this case the gap identified by Murphy (1991) persists. There has been little analysis of the role of the institutions of the new regionalization in the social reproduction of English regions.

This article pursues the issue of regional cultural reproduction onto the institutional terrain. To do this it takes an English region as its case-study. The South West is of further interest as it is, at least in part, a contested region. It encompasses a territory that has seen the only manifestation of popular regionalism in England. A Cornish Constitutional Convention was formed in 2000 to campaign for a Cornish Assembly and quickly obtained 50,000

declarations of support (Sandford, 2002). While being studiously ignored in the Government's 2002 White Paper on the English Regions (DTLR/Cabinet Office, 2002), this 'inconvenient periphery' (Payton, 2002) provides one of the few explicit examples in England of a struggle over scale. As Swyngedouw (2000) reminds us, 'social scale has to be understood as something that is produced historically: a process that is always deeply heterogeneous and contested'. Within the socio-spatial power struggle the establishment of the English regions is an example of 'scalar reconfiguration' (Jones and MacLeod, 1999). For the institutions of the new regionalism, the agents within them and the discourses they use are enmeshed in a struggle over scale. During this process the importance of some geographical scales is reasserted, the relevance of others downgraded and, occasionally, completely new scales created. Struggles over scale are also struggles to establish meaning involving competition between discourses privileging differing scales.

In the rest of this article, I briefly outline the context of the contemporary regionalization process (for government policy on the regions see Tomaney, 2001). I then reconstruct how the discourse of 'region' generally, and the 'South West region' in particular, is used within the everyday workings of the regional institutions. This is done through interview evidence from the personnel located in them, constituting a core set of data based on nine semi-structured interviews with officers in the Government Office for the South West (GOSW), officers and board members of the South West Regional Development Agency (RDA) and an organizer from the South West Constitutional Convention (SWCC). After identifying the statements made about 'region' and the rules of talking about 'regions', I explore in a preliminary way the discursive practice this entails, noting the consequences of this for other scalar discourses. The article concludes by reflecting on the everyday discourse of 'region' produced in the regional institutions, noting that its material and institutional resources are nevertheless constrained by certain limitations. These indicate that potential difficulties may lie in wait for the regional 'project', at least as it applies to the South West.

The regionalist moment in contemporary Britain

The Regional Development Agencies Act of 1998 led to the establishment of eight RDAs in England in 1999. RDAs were given control of the Single Regeneration Budget together with the resources of some previous development agencies, and are answerable to central government. They were established on the same territorial template as the Government Offices for the Regions (GORs), set up in 1994. These had extended the reach of central government into the regions, grouping civil servants from various central government departments (Sandford and McQuail, 2001). In addition, a little publicized by-product of the RDAs Act of 1998 was the formation of 'Regional Chambers', most quickly re-naming themselves as 'Regional Assemblies'. They have powers to become the 'Regional Planning Body' plus a rather vague role of scrutinizing the work of RDAs. Regional Assemblies, acting as forums for the discussion of regional strategy, make up a de facto form of regional government, albeit one with little legitimacy and a 'very low public profile' (Sandford, 2001).

The new English regionalization is only tenuously linked to cultural identity. The eight GORs/RDAs related closely to the regional template adopted by the Department of Economic Affairs in the 1960s. Yet, some academic commentators still claim that questions of regional identity are central to this new regionalization, with regions seen as social constructions emerging out of a search for new forms of identification (Tomaney, 2000; Tomaney and Ward, 2000). It is perhaps not surprising that this view emanates most coherently from academics based in the North East of England. In that region a sense of regional identity appears to match the areal template of the 'new' regionalization (see also Townsend and Taylor, 1975). In other areas this is not so clear. Here, the new institutional spaces of English regionalization do not reflect pre-existing notions of regional identity. Instead they are key sites for the construction of the cultural meaning of 'region' and 'regional identity', moving into the semantic vacuum that surrounds the concept of region in England. In this context everyday assumptions within the new regional institutions take on major importance.

The argument here is that agents located in the

institutions of the new regionalization play a key role in the creation of ideas about the 'region'. This approach to some extent collapses the distinction made by Lefebvre (1991) between 'representations of space' – the formal images of space developed by professionals – and 'representational spaces' – the everyday ways in which space is understood and experienced. Instead I am suggesting that the images of space produced within the institutions of the new regionalism are themselves produced in everyday ways. For the community of professionals inhabiting those institutions, certain images of the region become part of a set of shared assumptions, framing a version of the 'everyday'. Within it, habitual and repetitive discussion produces taken-for-granted assumptions about the region and its culture.

The regional discourse in the South West

In 1997 a consultation exercise concluded that the South West 'lacks a strong sense of common identity or effective regional institutions, and some consultees, principally Cornwall, Devon, Poole and Bournemouth argued for different RDA boundaries' (GOSW, 1997). This was echoed by some academics who felt that 'the South West does not constitute a coherent economic planning region' (Gripaios, 1991: 3). Partly because of this, GOSW and business focus groups in the late 1990s identified a priority to be the creation of a 'cohesive region', which needed to do more than 'build on its strong local identities' (GOSW, 1998: 11). It had to have an identity of its own. The role of the South West RDA as an active player in this construction of a discourse of the 'south west' was, indeed, remarked upon by several of those interviewed in this study (Interviews: 12 December 2000).

But, at the same time, the participants shared a consensus that there was little regional identity. Regional identity was 'not present' or 'not significant' and respondents shared a hesitancy about it. When pressed, three rhetorical strategies recurred. The first fell back onto the arbitrary boundaries of the region and argued that, as this was now government decree, the de facto region had to be accepted. The second produced claims for the existence of a regional image, or commonly held

representations of the region, even if a regional identity, a sense of belonging to the region, was absent. The third admitted the existence of place identities within the region, classing these as 'sub-identities' and accommodating them within an overall image of 'diversity', which was then presented as a strength of the region. Each of these three strategies can be expanded on in turn.

Recently, it has been pointed out that regions can be viewed both as bounded constructions and also as spaces of openness and connectivity linking different places and regions (Smith, 2004). But regions are not just spatially bounded by lines on maps; they also possess a conceptual boundary, one policed by a regional discourse that allows in some representations of the region and excludes others. Moreover, spatial and conceptual boundaries overlap and are mutually reinforced within the dominant regional discourse in the South West.

For some, notably the GOSW bureaucrats, the South West 'in one sense has a regional identity in that the Government has defined a boundary' (Interview: 12 December 2000). It was recognized that the 'south west is a figment of the Government imagination', the result of 'rather arbitrary judgement'. But once established, the weight of government approval provides the 'region' with authority and it was noted how local organizations – the Confederation of British Industry, the National Farmers Union, higher education among others – had organized themselves 'to fit our territory, our boundaries' (Interview: 29 January 2001). In interviews of personnel across the new regional institutions of England, Elcock (2001: 24) found 'there was general agreement that for practical purposes the GOR regions must be accepted as given, although they are not always ideal and may not reflect regional cultural boundaries'. The very arbitrariness of the centrally drawn boundaries rules them out of discussion, this being especially the case in regions like the South West where there is uncertainty about, and even opposition towards, these boundaries. The South West region, like all English regions, is 'under construction', but this is a construction with considerable institutional momentum, backed by the authority of central government and supported by the resources of the new regional institutions.

The second response given by participants in this study, when questioned about a regional

identity, was to pinpoint certain regional images. While uncertain about the existence of any level of popular regional consciousness they agreed that the region possessed some common unifying characteristics. The most frequently mentioned attribute was the 'quality of life' – the South West was 'an extremely attractive place to be . . . it's a draw, it's a selling point' (Interview: 12 December 2000). This linked to other concepts. The South West was perceived as 'rural', as having a 'distinct maritime tradition' and as a place of tourism; 'you think of the south west and you think of sand and the sea' (Interviews: 12 December 2000, 4 January 2001, 3 February 2001, 15 May 2001). In recounting these stereotypes our interviewees sometimes mentioned the role of heritage and the past, even 'myths and legends, which are quite important to this region' (Interview: 12 December 2000). The new regional professional clearly shares some very old popular assumptions about the South West, ones heavily structured by the role of tourism and a romantic trope of travel writing with its roots in the 19th century. The 'quality of life' message took centre place in the images chosen by the RDA to illustrate its newsletter in 2000 (*Leading Edge* 4). Here, shots of boats and maritime locations (but usually with a leisure rather than a trading connection) and an 'old' picturesque Dorset village were juxtaposed with illustrations of people doing exciting things inside hi-tec and placeless industrial plants and laboratories. Interestingly, people rarely appear in the maritime and heritage images; the latter are background, a photogenic backdrop to economic activities that occur elsewhere, a reminder of the opportunities for relaxation, yachting and leisure consumption on offer to jaded executives seeking a better 'quality of life'.

The everyday assumptions of the new regional institutional community of the South West revolve around this central, well-established and stereotypical image of 'quality of life'. In 1991 it was claimed that 'the south west already benefits to a considerable extent from its "corporate image" as a region with both man-made and natural beauty' (SWRPC, 1991: 9). At least one person interviewed recognized that this emphasis could easily tip over into:

a perception outside the south west of it being a fairly sleepy place . . . not much happening and Bristol and/or

points west are the graveyard of ambition and that people go there and never resurface, have a nice quality of life, everything is taken rather slowly. . . That's a caricature but there's probably an element of truth in it. (Interview: 12 December 2000)

In this particular instance the stereotype seems to be transforming into an autostereotype, a story people tell about themselves, one that becomes a part of their social reality (Sabel, 1993). Furthermore, the everyday region of the regional institutions is more dominated by rural, maritime and leisure imagery than are everyday assumptions in the actual settlements, streets and homes of the regional territory.

A third common response of our participants was to stress diversity as a regional strength. Recognizing a lack of regional coherence, the RDA has adopted a strategy of celebrating regional diversity. Virtually all those interviewed mentioned diversity.² Different 'cultures' within the region were 'not a problem at all. I think it creates a rich diversity which provides a much more interesting background rather than just one culture covering the whole thing' (Interview: 29 January 2001). In celebrating diversity the RDA puts emphasis on 'working together'; this phrase and the word 'partnership' recur frequently in their publications. But the everyday discourse is also careful to construct its boundaries. Diversity is hedged within certain limits and diversity must not be allowed to become 'divisiveness'. A GOSW officer was aware of this danger as 'curiously, one of the unifying features of the region is probably the fact that virtually everywhere people are very parochial' (Interview: 4 January 2000). However, rather than being a 'fact', this is better seen as another discursive component of the south-west region and one that results in those subjects of this discourse who raise objections to the regional project being classed as 'parochial' and their objections downgraded.

Communicating the regional discourse

An emphasis on image rather than identity clearly appears in the communication of this regional discourse to others, both within and beyond the South West. All three peak regional institutions now

have their website, intended as a single gateway to their activities. This is supplemented by newsletters, some aimed specifically at business audiences, plus a regular flow of press releases. To this end the South West Regional Assembly is devoting in 2003/04 £350,000 and 6.2 members of staff to 'raising awareness of regional issues, needs and aspirations' and 'enhanced communications with members, partners and the Region' (SWRA, 2003).

The regional discourse can be viewed as being communicated at three distinct levels to somewhat differing audiences. First, at a global scale, the new regional institutions represent the South West to business and, in particular, to potential inward investors. The RDA's website aimed at inward investors is titled 'a competitive climate for business'. The message, helpfully translated into Chinese, Japanese and Korean, is that the South West is a 'dynamic and innovative business location . . . [which] has an unrivalled environment, enabling you to realise your business opportunities and succeed' (SWRDA, 2003a). The neo-liberal competitive discourse informing this is coupled with one of the key elements of the regional discourse – environmental quality – and the link between the two asserted, if not exactly demonstrated.

Environmental quality is also the central image used by the South West England Brand Centre, a marketing initiative designed to 'develop a world class identity . . . for our region' (SWRDA, 2003b). This body produces marketing materials for local businesses, with detailed guidelines on how to use images, labels, icons, typography, even tone of voice, in order to present the regional 'brand'. The claim is that 'by using the South West England brand in all our communications we can talk the same language and begin a conversation with people about the story of South West England' (South West England Brand Centre, 2003a). But this is a heavily scripted 'story', bounded by the regional discourse identified above. Unsurprisingly, the intention of the marketing campaign is to project an image of the South West as 'one of the most forward-looking, exciting regions in the world', a 'spirited' place of 'energy and creativity'.

The discourse thus contains elements of interdiscursivity, attempting to fuse a reliance on traditional themes of 'the beautiful, natural environment that we're privileged to live in and which shapes the way we think and act', with more

dynamic elements borrowed from popular youth culture. The latter is indicated in the suggested 'tone of voice', which is proposed as 'plain speech with attitude'; 'we use (polite) slang expressions, like "party on"' (South West England Brand Centre, 2003b). The explicit and perhaps somewhat desperate intention here is to dispel stereotypes through a novel articulation of elements.

Nonetheless, the fundamental message remains very stereotypical, with a preponderance of maritime and landscape imagery. For example, the title of one of the photos in the image library, a cliff-top Cornish engine house framed by the setting sun – 'Time stands still' – locks the south-west 'brand' into a deeply traditional well of intertextuality.

At other levels the regional discourse is rolled out on a regular basis via newsletters and the press, the former aimed at the policy and business communities in the South West and the latter at the general population. Although more detailed research is required on the reception of this discourse by its audiences, the main role of the discursive practice is to embed the existence of the region in popular consciousness. Just as nations are produced discursively through 'banal flagging', the regular unquestioned and unremembered daily rhetoric of nationalism, so the 'region' is now routinely flagged in the columns of the local press as a 'topos without argument' (Billig, 1995: 96).

In the regional discourse of the peak institutions of the new regionalization the image of the South West as rural, maritime and diverse, cohering around a politically and economically driven project of regional construction, is seen as separate from cultural identity, the self-identification of the inhabitants of that region. When identity is recognized, it is found at a different scale. Thus an RDA board member insisted that the South West region had an 'amazing regional identity'. However, in elaborating on this position, the regional identity turned out to be a 'series of [local] identities', a position restated by a GOSW officer as 'different tiers of identity' (Interviews: 29 January 2001 and 4 January 2001). But the word 'tiers' implies a hierarchy of identity and this serves to remind us how an everyday regional discourse of the South West has consequences for imaginations of place at other scales.

Constructing the 'sub-region': the region, scale and Cornwall

MacLeod and Goodwin (1999) argue that there has been a failure to problematize the issue of scale.

Instead of taking the spatial context for granted they call for a multi-scaled analysis. As they state, there is a plurality of possible strategies and scalar fixes and the outcome of the creation of institutions of governance is always open to contestation and struggle. As we have seen, there is now a powerful set of bureaucratic interests entrenched at a 'regional' level. Those interests and the resources they marshal help to reproduce a particular discourse in respect of English regions. As this discourse embeds itself in the everyday practices of the regional institutions, other scales become defined in relation to it. The 'strong' identities within the region are categorized as aspects of a 'sub-regional' identity (Interview: 4 January 2001). The everyday assumptions reproduced in the new regional institutions thus effectively appropriate the term 'region' for one scale only. In doing so they act to exclude other potential regions and other regional 'communities'.

In many, even most, localities this may not be perceived as an issue, but in one part of the south-west region it is. In May 2001 the South West Constitutional Convention was launched, demanding an elected assembly for the South West. However, at a different scale a Cornish Constitutional Convention had already been launched. Indeed, in a debate on regions in the House of Lords on 21 March 2001 the only speaker from the South West, Baroness Rendell of Babergh, spoke in favour of a Cornish Assembly. Here, apparently, is a classic case of a top-down project of regionalization (the South West) colliding with an existing region based on a sense of cultural identity (Cornwall).

Supporting this interpretation, a leading member of the Cornish Constitutional Convention claimed in an interview for this study that 'if a region is ultimately going to be founded on democratic accountability [it] has to relate quite clearly with the people's identification with a place' (Interview: 30 April 2001). From this perspective, giving more centrality to cultural identity in underpinning a region, the South West can never be

a 'culturally coherent' unit. Reliance on a strong sense of identity relates to a well-established discourse (in Cornwall) of Cornwall as a historic nation. In our interview with the Cornish Constitutional Convention activist the 50,000 people who signed the petition calling for a Cornish Assembly were reconstructed as '50,000 people in Cornwall who have said Cornwall is a nation' (Interview: 3 February 2001). In fact the petition made no mention of Cornwall's status, whether region, nation or county. Yet, the existence of a hybrid sense of identity drawing from Celtic and national imaginings strengthens demands for a devolved assembly. But this is a demand for devolution to a scale that does not fit the regional discourse.

Only one of the new regionalist personnel interviewed explicitly referred to the Cornish campaign without prompting. He concluded that a Cornish Assembly might 'help sort out the too many tiers of local government', thus defining the Cornish issue as one of local government within a regional framework. This is only one of the ways in which the regional discourse has consequences for the discourse of Cornish regionalism. For instance, when the Office for National Statistics (ONS) agreed to recognize the right of people to write 'Cornish' in the 'other' box of the ethnicity question of the 2001 Census the RDA did not:

... offer the money to market that to the Cornish, i.e. to encourage the Cornish to write Cornwall in the box because I think that is just tipping over the balance from being distinctive to being divisive because I think it will be perceived as at least uncomfortable by those who are not Cornish living in Cornwall. (Interview, 15 May 2001)

Diversity was not celebrated in this instance, and the ability of the RDA to define what is diversity and what is divisiveness was backed up by its power over resources.

More discursively, potential tensions can sometimes be retrospectively rewritten as harmonious regional cooperation. During 1996 the ONS reported to central government that if the European regional map were redrawn to uncouple Cornwall from Devon then Cornwall would become eligible for EU Objective 1 Structural Funding. In early consultations on the proposal it was noticeable that a large majority of supporting statements came

from the Cornish ethno-regionalist movement and sections of local government in Cornwall. There was little or no public support from the existing 'regional' bodies (ONS, 1997). However, it became clear during 1998 that Cornwall was likely to qualify for Objective 1 funding. Consequently, one of the first acts of the new RDA in 1999 was to support the campaign.

This history has been subject to an interesting rewriting in the new regional institutions. It is now cited as an example of something that united the region 'at a political level, making common cause to get . . . a new European programme for Cornwall' (Interview: 12 December 2000). The role of Cornish pressure groups in keeping the demand alive and campaigning in the initial stages of consultation has been written out. The new narrative instead focuses on the regional role in pressing the Cornish case, and positions Cornish-based organizations as passive players in the process. Contrasting with this official narrative, the behind-the-scenes tensions around this event were alluded to by an RDA officer:

It's a moot point I think as to whether a Cornish culture and identity is helping to foster a regional governance in the sense the RDA might wish it or whether it is actually fostering separate identity as many in Cornwall would wish . . . The whole issue has been given a further twist with Objective 1 in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly where the EU recognises Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly as a separate region within Europe and that is in a sense in flat opposition to the RDA's position . . . it doesn't particularly help this building of a regional identity from Cornwall up to Gloucestershire and across to Dorset, to have the European Union recognising Cornwall as a separate region. (Interview: 15 May 2001)

Such tensions are rarely publicly expressed.

If one way of dealing with the conflict posed by the Cornish identity is to co-opt tensions into a discourse of regional harmony and consensus, another is to construct the demand for a Cornish Assembly as divisive and separatist. Clearly it is so from within the everyday south-west regional discourse. Viewing Cornwall as just one of the seven counties of the South West rather than as a special case invariably leads members of the regional elite to worry that 'giving' power to Cornwall will lead to a domino effect as 'Devon will want the very same thing and so will Dorset. So what do you gain at the

end of the day' (Interview: 29 January 2001). The same person argued that those demanding Cornish-based institutions 'want to put themselves in a cage. You cannot divorce yourself from this world economy that you live in, you can't live in a separate situation'. However much those arguing for a Cornish Assembly use a language of cross-border partnerships, inclusivity and openness, they are constantly forced to respond to such accusations of 'separatism'. Thus Andrew George, MP for St Ives and a prominent supporter of the Cornish Constitutional Convention, in claiming that Cornwall would 'have far greater clout, in a wider world, if it were recognised as a distinct place rather than subsumed into a large sanitised region for which it had no feeling', felt it necessary to calm his parliamentary colleagues by coupling this statement with an assurance that 'Cornwall does not want to cut itself off' (*Parliamentary Debates*, 18 December 2001).

Institutions, debate and power

As we have seen, the absence of any sense of an 'inherent' regional cultural identity in the South West resulted in uncertainty on the part of key participants in this study when asked to define the regional identity. Unable to identify agreed historical symbols of identity, policymakers in the new institutional spaces of the South West region resort to well-known symbols of tourism marketing. Thus Cornwall, being constructed in the regional discourse as a 'peripheral part of the region' (Interview: 15 May 2001), is assumed to be remote and is invested with romanticized images of difference, a place where the dominant leisure and maritime stereotypes of the South West region attain their purest and most unadulterated form (Hale, 2001). Indeed, this imagery has become taken for granted within the new regional institutions.

In a study of the governance of North-East England, Robinson and Shaw (2001: 476) conclude that almost all governing institutions 'both elected and unelected, are run by, predominantly, middle aged (or older) middle-class men'. They point out how the people who run the affairs of the North East are 'clearly not representative of the diversity of the region's people'. Anecdotal impressions

suggest that Robinson and Shaw's conclusions apply to the South West just as strongly as to the North East. Regional diversity is not represented in the peak institutions. Moreover, in the South West, it may be the case that a higher proportion of new regional professionals have no roots in the region. This may make them more prone to adopt the leisure/heritage/tourism imagery for a region to which they have been attracted in many cases by those very 'quality-of-life' factors they regularly invoke.

The new regional 'community' is in some respects, therefore, a community 'out of space', one located in a particular space but locked into networks that extend well beyond that space. Their class (and perhaps also gender) backgrounds predispose them towards a discourse of leisure or tourism-related 'quality of life' because that is the aspect of the regional territory they are most likely to have previously encountered. But, in inserting this aspect into the everyday discussion of their 'community', they exclude other sectors and 'communities' for whom 'quality of life' has little or no meaning. For example, the concentrated urban poverty associated with parts of Bristol and Plymouth or the more dispersed rural poverty of West Cornwall are rendered less visible in this discourse. While the imagery of the new regionalism excludes whole swathes of regional society, the relatively closed nature of the new regional community also excludes the majority of citizens from debates about the 'region'.

Barter has concluded that, to reduce tensions during the regionalization process, 'it is essential that local authorities and citizens be involved' (Barter, 2000: 28). While local authorities to some extent have a role, it is difficult to identify a public sphere, a space where people can debate affairs, contest meanings and negotiate claims in relation to regionalization (for this concept of a public sphere, see Habermas, 1984). Tomaney and Ward point to the 'lamentably low level of debate within the English regions about the questions that arise from [the devolution of institutions]' and the lack of 'civic arenas in which key issues can be raised and debated' (Tomaney and Ward, 2000: 471). In his research on Regional Assemblies, Sandford (2001: 14) also found that 'there was little attempt by respondents to consider the democratic legitimacy of the present bodies'. This lack of concern about

the absence of a public sphere in which to legitimate the new regional institutions seems likely to undermine attempts to create a top-down regional cultural identity. Moreover, it will not engender positive support for democratically elected regional government. In the absence of accountability, transparency and legitimacy, Assemblies in particular find the source of their power 'via personal contacts' (Sandford, 2001), thus reproducing the networking basis of quango governance.

However, another source of their power is the regional discourse discussed here. In the absence of a pre-existing regional discourse in England, this is becoming sedimented, and is backed by the power of the central state, to which the new regional institutions are accountable. In this way the 'orderly and sensible progression and debate' provided by the 'building blocks of the existing Government Office regions' offered by Local Government Minister Nick Raynsford (*Parliamentary Debates*, 18 December 2001) becomes an ordered debate, ruling out those who have doubts about the geographical basis of English regions. Here, discursive power is seen at its bluntest. Reflecting this, some writers have re-emphasized the role of the state in the process of regionalization (e.g. Lovering, 1999; MacLeod, 1999). But such a focus needs to be tempered by a realization of the limitations of that power. Teles and Landy (2000: 120) conclude that top-down decentralization on the current model 'seems unlikely to reproduce anything lasting'. As they point out:

identities take a very long time to readjust to new institutional structures, and in that transitional period resentment (or apathetic indifference) at being placed in an alien, unhistorical and unfamiliar political entity is likely to reduce willingness to contribute to public goods. (Teles and Landy, 2001: 120)

Furthermore, discourses do not just impose themselves upon society; they can be productive of new discourses.

This is most strikingly seen in the case of Cornwall. Here, unusually in the English context, an alternative notion of 'region' predates the new institutions of English regionalism. This, based on claims to a national and/or ethnic identity, is not easily accommodated by the new regionalization. Indeed, the usual response of the latter to Cornish

claims is to ignore them. But the discourse of the region has made this position increasingly untenable. For rolling out the discourse of a South West region has clarified and stimulated an outburst of interest in Cornwall in a Cornish 'regional' discourse. Paradoxically, the Cornish Constitutional Convention's petition remains to date the only unambiguous expression of popular support for devolved government outside Scotland and Wales. But this is a case where an everyday sense of territorial identity is the basis for a regionalist movement. In addition, this movement may have been actively strengthened by the circulation of the south-west regional discourse. Those supporting the process of devolution from the centre have underestimated the effect of their project in regenerating identities at more local scales than their preferred 'region'. In Cornwall, claims to cultural identity are more central to the debate about governance and feed on a more general aspect of everyday life, that is 'popular opposition to forms of public expertise seen as distant and unaccountable' (Flew, 1997: 100).

Conclusion

The new English regionalization can be analysed as part of a top-down process, involving the state and other institutions of governance. Nevertheless, this study reminds us that there is also a micro-aspect to this process. We have seen how the process of institution building is itself deeply, irrevocably, *cultural* in the way it produces and reproduces the meanings of the 'region'. Those located in the corridors of the new English regionalism in the South West reproduce their own representational space, a part of their everyday experience, habitual and taken for granted. At the heart of this representational space lies a discourse of the region.

This regional discourse nestles in turn within a set of statements established by central government about what can and cannot be debated. In this manner the borders of both debate and region are policed simultaneously. As the discourse becomes a part of the everyday it regulates the social practices of organizations within the 'region'. These increasingly have to take cognizance of the presence of the new regional institutions and of the resources

they command. The discourse of 'region', as evolved within the everyday of the new regional community, would appear to have a considerable momentum – part of a 'project to construct a new system of social regulation and collective action, drawing on existing elements in the social structure, mobilising cultural and political symbols for particular purposes, and constructing institutions in government and civil society' (Keating, 2001: 220). Thus, in the new regions of England, institutions have a major role in creating and transmitting regional identities. But Keating's analysis, one in which the new regional service professionals imaginatively create and recreate regions, perhaps overstates the autonomy available to regional 'elites'. For the empirical analysis of the South West of England suggests that while the regional discourse is sustained by and linked to systems of power, the circulation of that power is in practice hesitant and ambiguous and, indeed, can stimulate other competing discourses.

Although the discourse being developed within the everyday of the new regional community will have consequences for those who adopt a different definition of region at a different scale, the existence of the latter also acts to undermine and fracture that discourse in practice. Within the South West region the active campaign for devolved government to Cornwall begins to highlight the ambiguous effects of discursive formations. On the one hand, those calling for devolution to Cornwall, a campaign with a history that can be traced back at least to 1950 (Deacon et al., 2003), have had to evolve a strategy that adopts some of the language of the new regionalism and works within some of its everyday assumptions. On the other hand, the moment of English regionalism since 1997 has stimulated growing awareness of the issues and debate about them within Cornwall. Therefore, in 'building the region' in the South West the new regionalization may still end up helping to construct two regions.

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Notes

- ¹ MacLeod (1998) and Clayton (2002) have applied Paasi's model to Scotland.
- ² This emphasis on dealing with diversity in the South West is also noted by Elcock (2001: 240).

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