

TABLE RONDE N°4

POLITIQUES URBAINES ET TRANSFORMATION DE L'ÉTAT LOCAL EN GRANDE-BRETAGNE

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Local government in Britain has undergone a profound change over the last quarter-century. This paper presents an exploration of some aspects of that change and reflects on the impact on local democracy. It takes as a point of reference the city of Sheffield as a case that is typical of trends generally within Britain in spite of having some very specific characteristics. The paper concentrates particularly on the new forms of governance that have emerged in the period, and notes the ways in which the traditional system of local government has responded. However, before embarking on an analysis of the current state of local governance in Britain, the paper first defines some of the characteristics of local government in Britain and then charts the chronology of change in the past 25 years.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF BRITISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As with other countries of the European Community, systems of local administration were a product of the nineteenth century, and reflect the attempts to deal with a world that was rapidly changing as the result of industrialisation and increasing urbanisation. The particular characteristic of Britain, however, was that the push for a 'modern' system of local government came strongly from the local level where the new elite groups of cities like Manchester and Sheffield, which experienced rapid urban growth throughout the nineteenth century, became frustrated at their inability to control local affairs and the inadequacies of the existing local government system which presented a chaotic mix of control by the county justices of the peace and ad hoc commissions for dealing with street lighting and paving and sewerage. Within central government there was considerable resistance to reform, both of the parliamentary system but also of local government. When reform was enacted, it was partial and widely regarded as inadequate. But the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, which allowed some larger cities to elect their own councils who would become responsible for a range of local services, did mark an

important first step towards a proper system of local government, although it took until the end of the century for the system to become generalised throughout the country.

The detailed development of a local government system during the nineteenth century need not concern us. Suffice it to say that by the beginning of the twentieth century local government had developed a maturity in handling local affairs that saw it pressing for ever greater powers to deal with a wider range of services. Lagroye and Wright (1979) have described the difference between French and British local government as being between a conceded domain and a residual domain. Such a characterisation is too simplistic to do justice to the complexity or the richness of the relations between central and local governments in either country. But it does point an important difference between state traditions in both countries that is central to understanding the nature of local government in Britain.

The 'Glorious Revolution' of 1689 in which William of Orange replaced James II as king of England laid the basis for a constitutional monarchy in which the king could not rule in the absence of parliament. The agreement that was reached with William was specifically one of non-interference in local affairs but it also suited parliament, dominated by the landed gentry, not to promote change. The Webbs (1922) in their major survey of local government in England characterised the situation in the eighteenth century as one in which there was an almost complete lack of central oversight of local affairs. This may be an exaggeration – in London at least legislation to control new building in 1774 represented administrative innovation – but it correctly suggests a reluctance to become involved. When central government did concede the need for local government it was seen as a convenient means of devolving responsibilities for which Westminster had no taste. The idea, central to the French Republic, that local government would be an integral part of the constitution and emblematic of the pervasive reach of democracy, was wholly absent (see Schmidt 1990).

There are three interesting consequences of this grudging acceptance of local government. The first is that local administration has never been guaranteed a permanent existence. Local government exists by virtue of the will of parliament, which has been quite ready to modify the system, sometimes radically. It is equally the case that local government wields powers as of right: its authority to act has been granted by successive Acts of Parliament, and parliament has, once again, been perfectly happy to modify those powers very substantially. To this extent, local government in Britain can be described as weak.

The second consequence of central government attitude to local administration was that local government developed very much as a world apart from central government. Municipal independence and the willingness to take action became a hallmark of local authorities, particularly the larger ones. The series of magnificent town halls created in towns like Manchester, Leeds, Halifax and Sheffield in the second half of the nineteenth century (and outshone only by the Rathaus in Vienna) are witness to burgeoning local pride and independence in a way that the *mairies* of the IIIe Republic in France are not. More importantly, these local authorities developed formidable administrative capacity

by appointing their own staff, and in the twentieth century local government was a very large employer nationally. It is also worth noting that at the political level there was little overlap between local and central government. There has never been anything to compare with the *cumul de mandats* in France: though national politicians may well have had experience at the beginning of the careers as local councillors, once elected to parliament they invariably sever their links with local government. Seen in this light, local government has been strong in Britain, geared to serving local needs, relatively free to make and implement policy.

The third consequence was the very curious relationship that developed between central and local government. Given powers by parliament to deal, for example, with public health, local authorities often felt unsure as to how they should in fact be exercising those powers. Central government showed itself – once again – remarkably reluctant to take initiatives in giving advice and often seemed to wait to see how local authorities reacted before then trying to summarise practice as advice to be generalised. And yet central government found itself increasingly drawn into an advice-giving role, and after World War II, increasingly concerned about the amount of local authority expenditure. Paradoxically, therefore, central government became more and more involved in local affairs and more and more controlling of the activities of local government.

Nevertheless, the tradition of sturdily independent local authorities acting to improve the welfare of their citizens, through powers granted by parliament in the fields of housing, town planning, education and public health among others was firmly established by the early part of the twentieth century, and the accumulation of statutory duties ensured that they exercised considerable power at the local level. That power was of course legitimated directly through the ballot box in the classic mould of delegated democracy. In fact, in spite of universal suffrage from 1918 onwards, local councils were not fully democratic until 1972: a proportion of each council consisted of aldermen, who were in effect councillors for life, elected from within each council by reason, as often as not, of long service. There was a strong sense in which local councils were trustees for the welfare of citizens within the local authority area, following a tradition that stemmed initially from property relations, in which third parties might act disinterestedly on behalf of a beneficiary.

Sheffield fits well into this general pattern, developing early on a deeply rooted practice of municipal socialism, a benevolent paternalism that was geared to improving the quality of life of Sheffielders. This was already beginning to be true by the end of the nineteenth century, when the council was dominated by the Liberals, but it became firmly entrenched when the Labour Party took control in 192- , a control which they have maintained unbroken but for two short interludes to the present day. The economy of the city was seen as being the responsibility of industrialists and the assumption was that the economy of the city was fundamentally sound. The City Council's task, then, was to ensure that benefits were well distributed among the population, that housing, education and libraries were all available (Booth 2004, Seyd 1990).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AFTER 1979: APPLY A MARKET ECONOMY

There were a large number of reasons why this apparently cosy system should have broken down in the 1980s. The first is that the cost of running local government was becoming increasingly a concern for successive governments. Costs were beginning to escalate at a time when the country's economy had become fragile following the oil crisis of 1972 and the need to cut back public expenditure was becoming increasingly important. The second is the growing range of problems that faced the major cities of the country. The easy assumption, made in places like Sheffield, that the economic base of industrial cities was sound became increasingly untenable in the 1970s. Major problems of economic restructuring began to emerge in cities like Glasgow and Liverpool, which appeared to require the local authorities to act in entirely new ways. Finally, the problems that local authorities were now facing began to exceed their capacity to act. Such problems were both of economic and social development, and of infrastructure provision. Nowhere was this truer than in the London Docklands, where the collapse of port activities was compounded by the fact the Port of London straddled the boundaries of three local authorities.

There were, therefore, good reasons to think that local government was going to have to change even before the Conservatives took power under Margaret Thatcher in 1979. But leaving aside the profound structural changes in the country, the political philosophy of the Conservative Party was profoundly suspicious of the traditional modes of local government. For the Conservatives, local government had become too interventionist; the benevolent paternalism interfered unnecessarily with the workings of free enterprise. The solution lay in creating the conditions under which the free market could operate most effectively. Services traditionally supplied by local authorities could be provided more efficiently if they were opened up to competition. And the very process of policy making needed to be opened up to input from the private sector. The general urgency of the situation in urban areas was given a dramatic edge by the riots in Brixton and in the Toxteth area of Liverpool in 1981.

The major response to urban problems of the 1980s was encapsulated in the creation of the Urban Development Corporations (UDC) from 1979 onwards, of which the first was created for London Docklands. In all, thirteen UDC were created and all were given a fixed term within which to operate. They were created, and members of the controlling boards were nominated, by central government. Their membership was heavily weighted towards private sector involvement, and local industrialists were appointed to chair the boards. They operated within boundaries defined legislatively and within the boundaries they were given planning powers to control development and powers in the acquisition and development of land. Within their boundaries, therefore, and within the limits of the powers described, they were substitutes for the local authority which had no hand whatsoever in their creation.

There is more to be said about the impact of the UDC than can be explored in this paper. However, there are three points which are relevant to this discussion. Firstly, the model for the UDC was in fact drawn from the corporations set up to develop and manage the new towns created after 1946, the only difference being the extent to which the private sector was involved. Secondly, they operated on the principle that if the conditions were right for industrial and commercial development, then jobs would be created and the economy revived. In particular they were oriented towards managing the market in development land. Thirdly, as a result of being imposed upon local authorities they were often far from being a partnership between public and private sectors. Indeed, they often resulted in considerable tension. Such was the case in the early years in London Docklands where both local authorities and local communities felt wholly marginalised, and in the case of the local authorities, refused to cooperate.

THE MOVE TO PARTNERSHIP

Much has been written about how far the UDCs were effective in meeting their objective of job creation through manipulating the property market. The general conclusion is that they were enormously expensive and that the jobs created were either not suited to local populations or had been transferred from elsewhere. The tensions created by UDC coupled with a general incoherence in policies for urban regeneration led to an important shift of attitude by the late 1980s. This shift resulted in the emergence of the City Challenge programme, which was fairly swiftly replaced by the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). City Challenge was important because it returned the initiative in urban regeneration to local authorities. Its objectives were to secure a real partnership between public and private sectors, with the voluntary sector also playing a role, and to introduce a greater coherence in the delivery of public sector programmes. Money was not allocated according to need, but determined by the quality of the bid and the criterion of quality was the extent to which there was a real partnership created. The SRB did away with the competitive element in City Challenge but continued the principles of partnership and of ensuring a coordinated approach to applying government programmes within a particular locality. Unlike the UDC, the SRB won general approval and it is noteworthy that the Labour government elected in 1997 retained the programme until 2000.

On the face of it, SRB had restored to local government its traditional role. But in fact the whole concept of partnership within the programme suggested a rather newer way of working. SRB programmes were identified for defined areas, with a partnership board in charge of overseeing the policy making and its implementation. This was not at all like the traditional pattern of decision making in the council with its hierarchy of committees composed of councillors.

The Labour Party had a wider agenda than simply continuing the SRB programme. Its particular concern was that traditional local government was losing its credibility, with the very low turn out at local elections being evidence of this loss. The response of the

Labour government that did not begin to mature until 2000 was to try and re-engage the ‘community’ through a process that would be participatory to an extent that traditional local government was not. To this end, local authorities were required to set up local strategic partnerships, which would engage members of the community from all walks of life in formulating a community development strategy. This idea was further developed – albeit in rather vaguer terms – in the proposals to reform the land-use planning system which were the subject of a green paper in 2001.

THE URBAN RENAISSANCE

Quite apart from the desire for greater community involvement, another preoccupation of the Blair government was to have consequences for urban governance. He set up an Urban Task Force led by the architect Richard Rogers, whose remit was to propose ways in which the physical quality of cities might be improved (DETR 1999). Among the many recommendations was the idea of setting up Urban Regeneration Companies (URC) which would have a specific task of implementing urban improvements. These URCs would share with the UDCs the characteristic of being single-purpose agencies, but would be unlike UDCs in that, firstly, they would be non-profit-making companies and not public corporations and that, secondly, their shareholders were limited to the local authority, the government’s regional development agency and the national agency for regeneration, English Partnerships. Local authorities were to be given a central role in the URCs in the way that they were not in UDCs. In the first instance, three URCs were set up, in Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield but by 2004 there were a total of 16 URCs in England (English Partnerships 2004).

More recently still, the government has returned to the UDC as a vehicle for urban regeneration in two areas both in south-east England. One is being used to further the government’s strategy for growth in what has been called the Thames Gateway, the area stretching eastwards along the Thames from London Docklands. The other has been created for a smaller area on the Thames at Thurrock that presented particularly intractable problems of redevelopment. In neither case has setting up a UDC been the cause for controversy in the way that occurred in the 1980s, although in general the government’s strategies for growth in the south-east have been considerably controversial.

CHANGING GOVERNANCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The account given so far is of changes within central government policy and the imposition of new forms of governance destined to involve variously, the private sector, local communities and central government agencies. It gives no flavour of the effect of these changes at the local level and specifically on local authorities. In this respect, the case of Sheffield is instructive.

Sheffield's tradition of municipal socialism has been of very longstanding. To some extent it was a product of the particular characteristics of Sheffield's traditional industry, cutlery and tool-making, although it developed out of a larger tradition of cooperation and mutual self-help that was typical of one strand of thinking in nineteenth century Britain. The welfare of citizens was paramount, but the council did not traditionally see any role for itself in economic development: the city's wealth would continue to be based on the steel industry, which in the later nineteenth century had become highly innovative. Until as late as the 1970s, the City Council saw no need to revise this generally held belief.

When at the end of the 1970s the steel industry in Sheffield was hit by the major crisis which had already affected steel-making centres elsewhere in the world, it was wholly unprepared for the impact of the major loss of employment. Its first response was to try and develop community-based economic activity as a way of stemming job losses and to ensure that control was retained by the council by setting up in 1981 a Department of Employment and Economic Development. This proved to be a short-lived experiment, however. Central government imposed limits on local authority expenditure and by 1986 it became clear that the council would have to engage the private sector in the process of regeneration, in line with the Conservative government's political philosophy.

The first experiment in partnership was nevertheless designed to ensure that the leadership of the local authority was retained. The Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee (SERC) was a committee of the council, chaired by a councillor, whose only innovation was to bring in representatives of private sector industry to debate matters of policy and to help in the preparation of a strategy for the regeneration of the city. It is clear the government was not impressed by the efforts that the City Council were beginning to make. Sheffield had escaped the designation of a UDC in the early 1980s, but in 1988 a very large area in which the steel industry had been concentrated and where there was increasing dereliction was transferred to the Sheffield Development Corporation whose chairman was a local businessman. The City Council was undoubtedly hurt by this evident lack of faith in their first attempts at partnership through SERC, but did not refuse to cooperate as the London Boroughs had done in London Docklands, and two city councillors sat on the board of Sheffield Development Corporation throughout its existence. On two occasions, therefore, Sheffield City Council was pushed into adapting its traditional ways of working, in part as a result of the economic crisis, but substantially because of government pressures.

Sheffield Development Corporation was by its nature only destined to tackle part of the problems faced by the city. With the announcement of the City Challenge programme, the city twice bid for funding and was on both occasions unsuccessful. It seems likely that failure to secure funding under City Challenge was a result of the government's scepticism about the quality of its partnership with the private sector as represented by SERC, and indeed SERC was an unwieldy body for effective policy delivery. As a result of failure in City Challenge, the City Council set up another partnership body, the City Liaison Group that was designed to represent several of the city's activities in a more

streamlined body. This group brought together representatives from the city's two universities, the extensive health sector as well as private enterprise. Dabinett and Ramsden (1999) assert that it was very largely due to the activities of the City Liaison Group that Sheffield's failure in City Challenge was converted to success in every one of the six rounds of SRB.

This success spawned further changes in local governance. Each one of the SRB areas within the city had its own board representing a partnership of interests at the local level, and to coordinate this wealth of activity, the City Council set up the Sheffield Regeneration Agency, itself a partnership rather than a department of the City Council. The City Liaison Group in the meanwhile was consolidated after 1997 as the Sheffield First Partnership and intended to become a major focus for policy-making within the city. It was firmly tied to the City Council insofar as it has been chaired by the leader of the council ever since its inception and its deputy chair is the city's Chief Executive. In turn, the Sheffield First Partnership has spawned six other partnerships with particular sectoral responsibilities and has set up a forum in which a wider public can engage in debate. Sheffield First was in many ways a model for the Local Strategic Partnerships that the Labour Government wanted to see local authorities set up, and it is little surprise therefore, that Sheffield First was given formal recognition as a Local Strategic Partnership in 2002 (Sheffield First 2005). It is important to note, too, that Sheffield First has provided an important element of continuity when the Labour party lost its overall control of the City Council.

The final element in the changing structures of governance was the creation of one of the first Urban Regeneration Companies – under the title Sheffield One – in 2000. Its remit was to promote the physical regeneration of the city centre. It took as its main themes the need to develop Sheffield as a high quality retail centre, and to capitalise on the pool of expertise represented by the city's universities to promote an 'e-campus' for high technology industry. In a remarkably short space of time it prepared a planning strategy that outlined its vision for the city centre and has proceeded to negotiate with developers and other interests for the major elements of the scheme. The chairman is the chairman of Barclays Bank, but the City Council as one of the three shareholders in the company maintains a major stake in the process. Indeed, it is worth noting that the work of Sheffield One was foreshadowed by an earlier project, the Heart of the City, funded through the SRB programme together with European funding, and for which the city had set up yet another agency. This agency was transferred in its entirety to Sheffield One.

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON CHANGING GOVERNANCE

Presented in this way, two distinct stories become apparent. One is that of central government anxious to change the way in which local government was operating, whether because of a belief in market economics or because of a perception that the population at large was not sufficiently engaged with the process of decision making at the local level. Changes have thus been informed by changing political philosophies, all

of which have tended to reject the traditional assumptions on which local government was based. Also conspicuous in this history of the past 25 years is the extent to which central government, traditionally reluctant to become involved in local affairs, has nevertheless intervened more and more in the way in which local authorities have conducted their business. The Conservative government was accused of increasing centralisation, and critics have noted the way in which it was obliged to exert control in order to achieve its ideal of liberating the free market from bureaucratic control. But the tendency has been no less marked under the Labour governments of Tony Blair.

Seen from the local level, however, the account of the past 25 years takes on a different complexion. Although Sheffield's experience has particular features which differentiate it in detail from other cities, the general pattern is one that finds echoes elsewhere. Here was a city overtaken by rapid economic change, finding itself bereft of solutions, and at the same time under pressure to change its ways of working. The story from the perspective of Sheffield is one of enforced adaptation, in which partnership and community involvement eventually came to seem attractive ways of working through a period of very great difficulty, and a virtue was made of necessity. Now experiencing something of a revival, the City Council would point to the activities of the Sheffield First Partnership and Sheffield One as being instrumental in achieving that revival. Locally, there has been little dissent from the new model of local governance that has emerged.

In these circumstances it becomes important to analyse what the changes of the past 25 years have actually meant for local governance. The first point to make is that several forms of local agency that have been developed by successive governments have had very different objectives and have been legitimated in different ways. It is possible to see within the diverse structures created three distinct typologies.

The quest for efficiency

Among the many criticisms that the Conservative Party made of local government was that, lacking the rigour of market competition, it was fundamentally inefficient. Such inefficiency was wasteful of resources but also impeded the market from realising its potential to further necessary economic development. Local services would be far better delivered, it was argued, by the private sector, and local councils' own services should be subjected to comparison with outside companies. A briefly held Conservative ideal for local government envisaged that a local authority would meet no more than annually and then only to agree contracts for service delivery. If such a view was always unrealistic, the Conservatives nevertheless did introduce measures designed to improve the efficiency of local services. Compulsory Competitive Tendering, in which local authorities were required to put some services out to tender, was one such measure.

UDC can also be seen in this light. There was real and justified doubt that local authorities could actually cope with the major problems of economic decline and failing

infrastructure with which they were confronted. UDC would be efficient because they would be single-purpose agencies with highly focused objectives and would draw in the expertise of private enterprise to achieve those objectives. They would incorporate an understanding of the needs of the development industry in a way that local authorities did not and perhaps could not. They would be able to act swiftly.

Much the same can be said of the URC. Once again, a highly focused organisation that was sympathetic to the needs of the development industry and knowledgeable of the problems that the industry faced was seen as necessary to deliver the 'urban renaissance'. Once again, there was implied criticism of existing local government departments to deliver change effectively. The difference between the UDCs and URCs was that the URC probably had access through the three shareholders to a greater breadth of relevant expertise than the UDCs were able to muster.

Engaging with community: partnership and participation

'Community' has been one of those words that have been used with considerable ambiguity, a product perhaps of the very longstanding debate within British society on the desirability of cooperative action. In practice, in one locality there are likely to be many communities defined by place, ethnicity, status and religion among many other possibilities. 'Partnership' is equally a word subject to many different interpretations. Almost all the initiatives described in this paper aimed at achieving partnership in some form or other. Even UDCs were described as encouraging partnership with the private sector, even though in reality they represented a fairly brutal substitution of a new structure for an old one (in the form of the local authority). It is particularly striking in this respect that the Sheffield Development Corporation, led by a local businessman, nevertheless came into conflict with local small businesses who vigorously opposed the compulsory purchase of their premises for a the creation of a new road (Raco 1997).

The failure of UDC to engage adequately with local communities led to alternative strategies at both national and local levels. At local level in Sheffield the result was the creation of SERC in which the private sector found it might have common cause with the City Council in thinking about strategies for dealing with economic decline. In its constitution, SERC was still fairly close to being a traditional local authority committee, but already the principle that not only elected representatives might be engaged in formulating and implementing policy was established.

Such was also at the heart of the partnerships boards for SRB areas. We have already noted how the quality of the partnership was a criterion for both the City Challenge and the SRB programmes. Local authorities were no longer marginalised in these programmes in the way that they had been with the UDC, but the proposed ways of working did not suggest a return to classic local authority operation through the

committee structure. Instead, partnership was being widened to encompass not only private enterprise, but also local residents' groups and others affected by the problems that SRB was designed to solve. What becomes clear is that a great deal of policy making was being devolved from the Town Hall to the boards and to the Regeneration Agency. This devolution in turn has led within Sheffield to the creation of local trusts, which have made a significant input into local regeneration. It has also led to a professionalisation of voluntary groups who have become involved in this process.

Finally, the creation of the Sheffield First Partnership was the City Council's own initiative to widen the policy debate within the city. Conspicuously, however, it has resulted in a transfer of policy deliberation from the council chamber, its traditional home, even if the City Council remains implicate in the deliberations that take place.

Structures of governance and new modes of financing

There is another way of categorising these new forms of local governance. The SRB agencies were of course a direct response to a new funding regime whose purpose was to coordinate disparate financial packages. The need to create partnership bodies that would have a role in policy formulation was in the first instance a direct response to the need to capture funding; the failure to set up an adequate partnership body was, as we have noted, said to be the reason for Sheffield's failure in its City Challenge bids. It is worth noting, too, that the declaration of South Yorkshire as an Objective 1 area by the European Commission has had a similar effect with partnership bodies being created to implement policy within the region.

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGING GOVERNANCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The new structures that have proliferated in cities like Sheffield over the past 25 years were set up with different objectives even if they are often collectively characterised as representing partnership. They give rise to three sets of questions, about their effectiveness, about the extent to which they really do widen participation in local decision making, and about their effect on local democracy. These are very large questions, which can only be treated summarily here.

The effectiveness of the new forms of governance

There is of course a range of measures that could be used to test the effectiveness of the new forms of governance. Have, for example, these new structures achieved the physical transformation of cities that in many cases was their primary objective? The UDCs, whose work goes back furthest in the 25-year period that is reviewed in this paper, can in

many ways offer the most impressive record of physical change. In Sheffield the Lower Don Valley has seen major new development, and the images that were offered by the film *The Full Monty* – in themselves an accurate reflection of the state of affairs in the 1980s – are largely a matter of the past. In London Docklands, extensive areas of development have taken place, most visibly in the major new commercial centre in the Isle of Dogs, but less spectacularly in residential development elsewhere. It is of course open to debate whether this development might have taken place anyway: the western end of London Docklands was sufficiently close to the City to have been a likely candidate for urban regeneration without the intervention of the London Docklands Development Corporation. In Sheffield, on the other hand, the Sheffield Development Corporation was almost certainly a necessary catalyst for change (Dabinett and Ramsden 1999).

If change has undoubtedly taken place, the second question is whether it has in fact benefited the areas in which the UDCs were located. Here the conclusions are a great deal less encouraging. That there was job creation in London Docklands is generally accepted, although much was in the form of transfers from other places (Brownill 1999). Dabinett and Ramsden (1999) doubt whether the development in Sheffield's Lower Don Valley did in fact work meet the local population's needs.

The final question is whether the UDCs represented good value for money, and whether they did in fact draw in private sector investment which might not otherwise have happened. Here the verdict is least satisfactory. The results suggest that the jobs that have been created in UDCs have been at very considerable cost to the public purse. Indeed, so far from 'levering in' private finance to solve the problems of urban regeneration, it has been argued that firms such as Olympia and York, the developers of Canary Wharf, used their investment to prise out money from the public sector, specifically in the creation of the Jubilee Line of the London Underground.

It is too soon to say whether the URCs, which are closest in their objectives and organisation to the UDCs will suffer from the same defects. In terms of meeting local needs, the involvement of the local authority as one of the shareholders in theory guarantees a much greater responsiveness than did the UDCs: they are much more likely to mesh with the aspirations of local councils. It is also too soon to say whether their operations will be effective financially, but URCs have a wider remit than did the UDCs and a measure of cost-per-job-created is less relevant to their work.

The final point to make about the effectiveness of both UDCs and URCs is that the problems they have been dealing with are indeed exceedingly complex and almost certainly were beyond the traditional structures of local government – geared to service delivery and to development of schools and housing – to deal with. Partnership with the private sector in one form or another has in fact a very long history in Britain. The case for highly focused organisations that could deal effectively with the development industry is a strong one.

The effectiveness of SRB agencies and of the Local Strategic Partnerships is even harder to assess. Notable gains have undoubtedly been made in particular localities; in the end the SRB programme was criticised for losing the focus that it was originally intended to have on places with the greatest needs whose resolution might have benefits over a wide area. There has as yet been no work on the effectiveness of Local Strategic Partnerships in the development of local policy: indeed, the measure of their effectiveness must in large part rest with the extent to which they do draw in a full representation of the local population.

The representation of 'community'

The new forms of partnership discussed in this paper vary widely in the ways in which local communities have been involved in decision making. The UDCs were by their very nature not intended to be representative at all, and as we have noted, gave rise to conflicts with local residents, local authorities and local businesses. There were tools for achieving a largely political aim of involving private enterprise in the making and implementation of public policy.

All the other structures described in this paper do make some claim to involving the community, an objective which came to have increased importance after the return to power of the Labour Party in 1997. The SRB programme was founded on the principle of partnership, and there is little doubt that many more groups and people became involved in formulating ways of solving local problems and then being given the resources to put them into effect. This it can be argued has led to a professionalisation of the voluntary sector, which of its very nature must favour the more articulate and competent members of local communities at – perhaps – the expense of the less competent and less articulate. This is perhaps even truer of the Local Strategic Partnerships, which must always risk being dominated by powerful and influential voices.

The inherent problem is that of what actually constitutes the 'community' that is regularly invoked as the legitimisation of these forms of local governance. Local populations are increasingly not homogeneous, and ensuring that the multiplicity of diverse interests and needs is adequately represented in participative democracy is bound to be exceedingly difficult.

The effects on local democracy

The one thing that can be said with any certainty is that the structures of local democracy have become increasingly fragmented in the course of the past 25 years. This has been paralleled by a growing disaffection, as represented by the increasingly low turn-out for local elections, with traditional local councils. Underlying this pattern is the move that is implicit in the creation of new forms of governance, from representative to participative

democracy. There seems little doubt that such a move will remain a permanent feature of local democracy in the 21st century. The complexity of the problems to be addressed and the increasing desire of people to be directly involved in the processes of urban change are bound to lead to radical and permanent changes in local governance. One major question will be how far the logic of the way in which these new structures is understood and can respond to the full range of needs of local populations.

The other major question is whether the creation of agencies like Local Strategic Partnerships and URCs will lead to a series of oligarchic structures over which elected representatives have decreasing control. There is a very strong case for having a strengthened representative democracy to ensure that minority voices are not lost and that their needs may be adequately mediated in the policy process. This almost certainly is the challenge for the next 25 years.

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