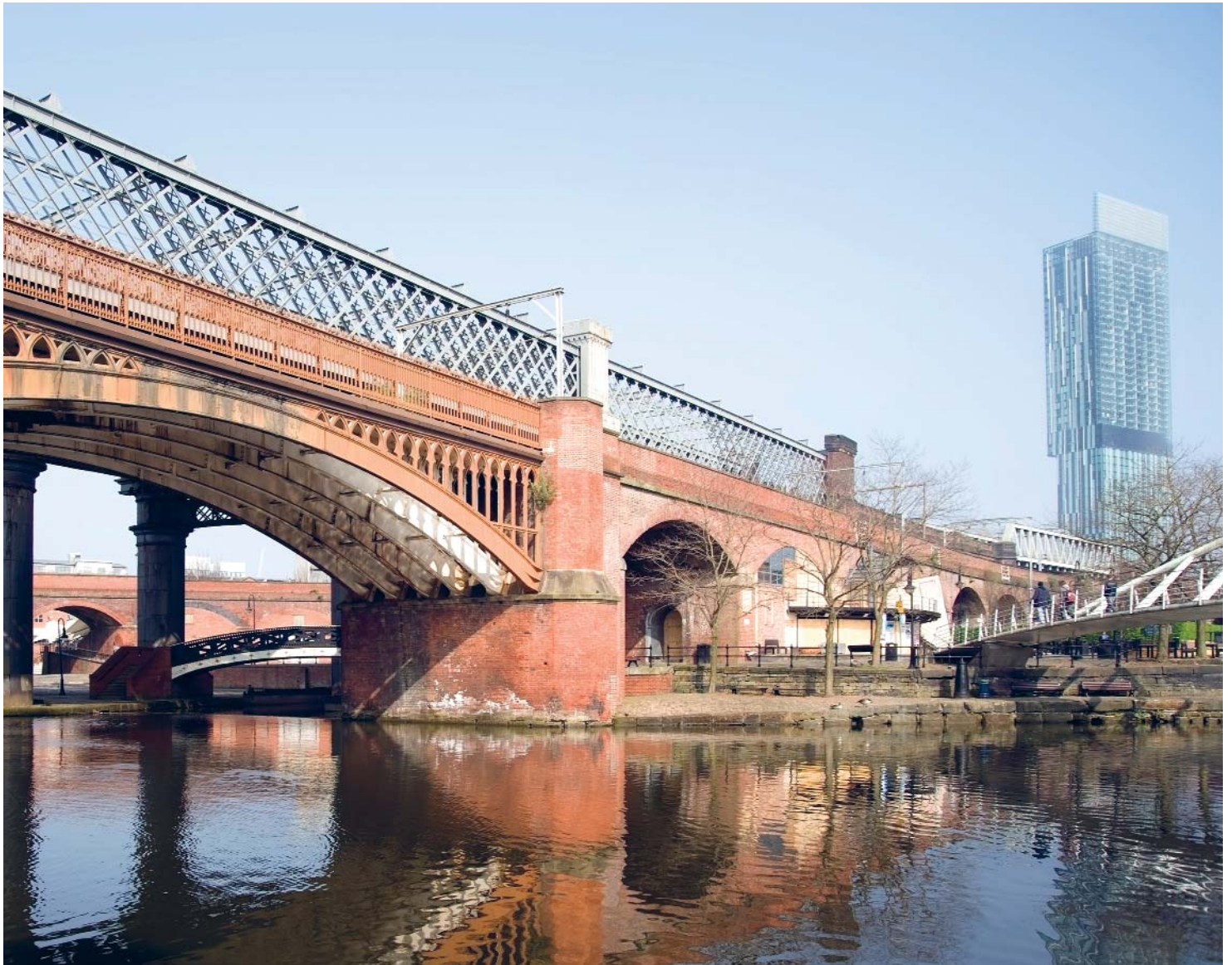


Diverse Places, Diverse Responses

Mike Coombes



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This paper is one of a series of 12 commissioned by the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at the University of Newcastle to support the Northern Futures research programme commissioned by The Northern Way through the Spatial Economics Research Centre (SERC).

The papers were commissioned to support discussion at the Symposium on Economic Development in the North of England, hosted by The Northern Way in conjunction with SERC and CURDS, held in Salford on 25 and 26 March 2010.

Each paper reports the views and perspectives of the individual author(s) and should not be taken to reflect the views of the commissioning organisations.

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Contents

Page

02	Introduction
02	Places in the North of England
06	Turning points within the North
09	Conclusion
12	References

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Introduction

This paper considers potential spatial impacts of the Turning Points across the three regions of The Northern Way: put simply, which types of areas are likely to be resilient to the changes and perhaps even prosper, and which types of area might suffer?

Strong arguments have been made for a range of consequences in much of northern England of the various turning point “drivers” of change. It is worth noting that there are also three global threats on the horizon – shortages of food, water and energy – that have been characterised as threatening a “perfect storm” of mutually reinforcing international crises. A reasonable response to this catalogue of seismic shifts to the status quo is that any predictions of their combined impact must be very cautious. Even greater hesitancy is sensible for predictions at the sub-regional scale¹ of most interest here.

The next section of the paper sets out the approach taken in this paper to make the diversity at the sub-regional scale manageable by developing a typology of places. The following section then works through the turning points one by one, considering their potential impacts on the types of place within the North that have been identified. A concluding section then pulls together the implications identified to address the question set at the start of this paper by taking each of the area types in turn.

Places in the North of England

There is substantial diversity among places at the sub-regional scale in northern England that are facing the impacts of the turning points and the changes they may bring about. One perspective of geographers is that each place is unique, not least because each has a distinctive history of development. This history has not only shaped its present characteristics but continues to affect how it responds to change. One interpretation of this idea is the notion of path dependence (Simmie et al, 2008). For this paper, the implication is that a long-term perspective is crucial: how places will respond to new changes will be partly shaped by deep-seated features that have differentiated them from other areas over a long period.

A more prosaic way in which each place is unique is that each is in a unique location. This observation becomes more significant when put in a relational perspective, because it draws attention to the distinctive set of opportunities and constraints arising in any location. A simplistic example here is that the situation and prospects of the Bootle in inner Merseyside are profoundly different from those of another Bootle that is in a remote part of the Lake District. This paper reflects some of these locational aspects of place uniqueness, along with a focus on long-term relationships between areas that have shaped the prospects for different places over decades.

Rooting the discussion below in locational and other long-term distinctions between areas can exacerbate the scale of challenge presented by the uniqueness of places. Two initial steps make the challenge manageable. The first is to emphasise that, whilst each place is in an absolute sense unique, it is conventionally accepted that places are groupable into types that broadly share key characteristics. For example, the categories urban and rural are certainly “fuzzy” – and each includes places which are hugely varied – but the two types are sufficiently distinct from each other for them to usually merit differing strands of research and policy. As a result, this part of the paper develops an appropriate typology of places for the following discussion of the turning points and their impact on different places in the North.

The other step needed is to resolve the question of the scale of place in the typology. Given the long-term nature of the changes envisaged, spatial impacts will not remain

¹ By way of comparison, weather forecasts from the Met Office are only made available for small areas for a short period ahead (ie. when uncertainty over the processes is least): the further ahead, and hence the more uncertain the forecast, the larger the area it is made available for.

constrained within very localised areas but will have feedback and spillover effects via externalities and adjustment processes. Many of the turning points bear upon the economic prospects for areas and this suggests that sub-regional economic areas are the scale of most interest here. New policy regimes such as those enacted in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act emphasise analysis at this scale in relation to the economic and “place” policy agendas. No single agreed set of areas exists at this scale, but the most frequently cited template is that offered by Travel-to-Work Areas and so it is this set of areas which is discussed here.

One consequence here of analysing at the sub-regional scale is that the distinction between urban and rural can be appropriately specified: areas in the countryside that are intimately linked with nearby substantial urban areas must be viewed as inherent to those urban sub-regions (eg. North Yorkshire areas near Middlesbrough are part of the Teesside area in relation to the issues discussed here). This means that the term rural is used here for sub-regions like Kendal where the key drivers are largely independent of larger urban areas for everyday purposes. The second consequence of looking at the sub-regional scale is that the paper cannot engage with the locality and neighbourhood scale issues centred on the built environment, for example.

The discussion so far has set out three starting points for developing a typology.

1. There needs to be an emphasis on long-term differentials between places.
2. The relationship between places is an important continuing factor in play.
3. There is a distinction² between rural (as defined here) and more urban areas.

These three dimensions shape the typology devised below.

The strength of a long-term perspective can be illustrated here with a brief look at the early application of computing in geography by Moser and Scott (1961). Larger towns were classified based on 1951 Population Census data using principal component and cluster analysis. Principal Component I was the key influence on the findings. With its focus on education qualifications and related socio-economic differentials, Principal Component I can now be termed a measure of human capital. This clearly foreshadows many subsequent analyses of the economic prospects for areas which have put human capital in the foreground (eg. OECD, 2009a).

Moser and Scott (op cit) developed a classification of the towns from this analysis. Looking at the town groups with at least three towns either in the North or in the South and Midlands, there were four whose mean Principal Component I scores were near or above the national average: these four groups included just five northern towns between them, but 36 towns in the South or Midlands. In contrast, the five town groups with Principal Component I scores – that is, levels of human capital – that fell distinctly below average included 42 northern towns, whereas only 18 were found in the South or Midlands. The group with the lowest average human capital scores was the Mining town group; this highlights the more general fact that what had been observed by analysing data for 1951 proved to be indicating a crucial and long-lasting differential between places. The lagging level of qualifications and skills in many parts of the North remained prominent in policy throughout much of the half-century since the Census of 1951 and, of course, remains highly relevant in the diverging prospects of places.

For these reasons, qualification levels are taken here as a key indicator to use as the longer-term differential between places shaping their growth dynamics. Of course, the other key factors for the typology – relative location and urban-rural contrast – persist through time, too. For example, the contrast in level of urbanisation between the more rural north and more urban west of Yorkshire remains despite the gradual shift in population within the North of England towards its smaller settlements (see, for example,

² OECD actually deem no part of the North to be a predominantly rural region, according to their typology that uses criteria developed to be as internationally comparable as possible (OECD 2009b).

Figure 3.4 in Parkinson et al, 2006). This is not to say all settlements below some size level have grown; former industrial and coalfield villages continue to belie such a generalisation. Even so, a broad contrast between areas in terms of their settlement size remains relevant here, although the category “urban” is clearly too large to be much value.

Parkinson et al (op cit) point to the distinctive role played by dominant regional centres in recent research and policy. This distinctive role means that it is appropriate for one of the place types being identified here to be the Core Cities in the North (Leeds; Liverpool; Manchester; Newcastle; Sheffield). As in any typology, of course, this does not imply that all members of a group are entirely similar. For example, there is a wide recognition that for a long time Liverpool suffered more severe decline than most other British large cities. One characteristic which these cities do definitely share is their provision of higher-order services for large populous surrounding areas. As key regional cities³ they service their regions; they have been doing this for a long period, and this role seems certain to be integral to their future.

The remaining urban areas are a very heterogeneous group, ranging in size from larger cities like Hull to smaller towns like the Cumbrian urban areas. At this point, the emphasis above on the largest cities servicing a wider area can provide a new but important way of separating some of these urban areas into a second type here. This shifts attention to the second factor in the typology, which can be seen to take on board the “relational” emphasis within European spatial planning (Healey, 2004).

One corollary of the Core Cities providing services to a wider area than their own immediate surroundings is that some urban areas are over-shadowed by other, probably larger, nearby centres. An area over-shadowed by others can be identified by analysing commuting flows between areas, but the fact areas like Macclesfield have strong commuting flows with Manchester does not itself mean that such a town is either advantaged or disadvantaged by that relationship (cf. Lucci and Hildreth, 2008). A more subtle view is that the impact of the relationship depends on the distinct roles each place plays in their region. The following brief analysis applies the emphasis here on long-term dynamics in a distinctive but relevant way.

Carruthers (1967) conducted an ambitious analysis of 1961 Census of Distribution data for retail centres, setting standards for much work to follow. One of the less celebrated elements of this analysis was the identification of centres whose scale suggested a restricted attraction of shoppers from outlying areas. These centres were interpreted as having very constrained catchment areas, associated with the proximity of larger centres nearby.

Table 1 shows constrained centres existing across much of the shopping hierarchy. For example, Bradford is a constrained centre which had the same high score (20) that applied to Hull which is not constrained. (Other comparator pairs of constrained and unconstrained centres range from Bolton and Preston among the larger centres down to Castleford and Bishop Auckland at the smaller end of the ranking.) Table 1 provides a comparison of the Carruthers 1961-based scores with the retail floorspace data from 2004 for the same shopping centres. The two datasets do not measure retail centre size in exactly the same way, but an average ratio, calculated for all the northern centres together, provides a base against which to compare the same ratio for any individual centre. Thus the value of 117.2 for the constrained centres with a score of 20 on 1961 data shows their retail centre size increase in the 1961-2004 period was 17% more than the size increase of all northern centres taken together.

Table 1 may exaggerate how much more quickly larger centres grew when compared to the smaller ones, but the analysis is fully robust when comparing centres with similar

³ Note that this differs from an oft-cited “city-region” idea in which the region around the city essentially services the city (eg. by providing commuters): although there is a symbiotic relationship between the constituent parts of a region, the view taken here is that the more fundamental aspect is the services that the city provides to its region (with a parallel drawn to the creation of county towns to provide central functions for counties, rather than the counties being secondary to the county towns).

initial scores. Thus what are crucial here are comparisons made horizontally (not vertically). Table 1 then makes it very clear that the constrained centres have consistently grown more slowly than centres of equivalent size in 1961. The clear conclusion is that there was a growth “penalty” of being a constrained centre which has persisted strongly over the latter part of the 20th century.

Table 1: Standardised ratio of 2004 to 1961 size measures of northern retail centres

score* (1961)	constrained	not constrained
24	[none in north]	209.6
23	[none in north]	[none in north]
22	[none in north]	196.7
21	[none in north]	[none in north]
20	117.2	160.2
19	91.5	106.1
18	93.6	108.0
17	81.6	101.7
16	65.6	94.7
15	60.8	100.2
14	66.5	111.5
13	46.8	56.5

* score on the provision of selected shopping facilities

The reason that constrained centres slipped further behind their stronger neighbours over recent years is not difficult to find. The profit motive makes retailers service populations in as low-cost a way as possible, and this will lead them to serve the same population from one location rather than two where possible. As people have become more mobile (Schäfer et al, 2009) two towns – which of course remain the same distance apart – gradually become more readily served from a sole site. If one of the towns was already over-shadowed by the other, so that on 1961 data it could already be identified as having only a constrained role, it is unsurprising if that town saw successive retailers concentrating on the stronger centre nearby. Recently some such towns have become termed “under-served markets” (Claxton and Siora, 2009). The key process here is a growth of longer-distance linkages and the consequence, as observed in very many urban and regional circumstances, is that increasing flows between two areas tend to bring net benefits to the stronger area.

Some evidence to support the argument that there are more general disadvantages in being a constrained town can be seen from linking this analysis to Hall et al (2001) who separated retail hierarchy issues from other key aspects of urban status based on major service facilities. This hierarchy defined on criteria other than retail status shows that from 1965 to 1998 virtually half (48%) of the constrained northern towns that they analysed fell to a lower rung in the national urban hierarchy – in fact 12% fell by two rungs – whereas just a third of the other northern centres fell by one rung, and only 3% by two rungs. This confirms that the over-shadowing effect observed from the retailing data was associated with a broader pattern leading to an increasing loss of services. Services play such a dominant role within modern economies that such a sustained loss of service activity to a stronger nearby centre will be a critical weakness for over-shadowed towns, both directly in lost potential job growth but also indirectly through the key role of service facilities in making places more attractive.

The arguments here have led to looking at rural and urban areas separately and, among the urban areas, separating out the Core Cities and the constrained towns, which are located near Core Cities in practice. This leaves the remaining categories “other urban”

and rural which now need to be considered further. As for rural areas, Lowe and Ward (2009) identify a continuum with genuinely separate rural places at one end and, at the other end, “rurbs” that are really just “socio-economically extensions of urban agglomerations” (p.1330). For this paper these parts of the countryside that are closely integrated with urban areas have already been grouped with those urban areas as a result of the decision to analyse at the sub-regional scale: this means that “rurbs” need not be treated separately here. Hence the category “rural” here will only include areas remaining largely separate from urban areas; they tend to be more peripherally located and most are in or near National Parks in fact.

The final issue to be dealt with is the “other” urban areas: those which are neither Core Cities nor constrained by a dominant neighbouring area. Coombes et al (1979) used the term “free-standing” for this type of area, but it was also recognised that they form a very heterogeneous group of places. Recalling the first starting point for the typology, it is appropriate to divide this residual category according to their levels of human capital. In practice then, the set of “other” urban areas have been divided according to whether the proportion of their 2007 working age populations who are qualified at NVQ4 or above was more than national average. For simplicity, the two categories are referred to below as the Higher-Skill Towns and Lower-Skill Towns: Table 2 gives an example, from each of the three northern regions, of the five types of area now identified as appropriate for the discussion in the rest of this paper.

Table 2: A classification of areas in northern England: examples from each region

Area Type	North West	Yorkshire & Humber	North East
Core Cities	Manchester	Sheffield	Newcastle
Constrained Urban	Blackburn	Huddersfield	Sunderland
Higher-Skill Towns	Chester	York	Darlington
Lower-Skill Towns	Blackpool	Scunthorpe	Teesside
Rural Areas	Penrith	Richmond	Berwick

Turning points within the North

This is the key section of the paper which reflects on the implications of the turning points discussed by earlier papers for each of the five types of area in the North.

It is appropriate to consider aspects of technological change first, because all past evidence indicates that this is one form of change which will occur regardless of any other shifts in economy or society. Perry (2010) identifies the North as rather badly placed to benefit directly from technological advances because it lags behind the South in the endowment of knowledge-intensive sectors and also in patenting rates. One or two of the Core Cities and the Higher-Skill Towns are more favoured, largely due to the presence of strong universities, but they are the exceptions even within these area types. The least likely to benefit from such developments are the Lower-Skill Towns because their labour forces will not attract employers in new technology sectors.

On the more specific issue of information technology, Richardson and Tranos (2010) emphasise the urban-centric nature of the vital supporting infrastructure. Clearly this means the Core Cities are likely to be the favoured area type in the North, and some of the Constrained Urban towns may benefit from being close to these major centres. Rural Areas were seen to be particularly threatened by a possible widening of the digital divide. In terms of the second-order impacts, Richardson and Tranos (op cit) emphasised that firms make productivity gains from exploiting newly available technology by being adaptable: this flexibility is probably more difficult for branch plants than for independent firms. Employment in many northern areas is dominated by branch plants,

particularly areas that have had a sustained period of regional policy assistance (which includes a large proportion of the areas in the categories Constrained Urban and Lower-Skill Towns). A final point here is that advanced information and communication technology could cause substantial job displacement in some more basic information processing sectors. Contact centres have already seen this occur with the off-shoring of some work that had begun to look like a major growth opportunity for many larger urban areas of the North.

Taken together, the set of points on technological change reviewed here come to the not greatly surprising conclusion that existing differentials – which have of course been partly created by earlier versions of such technological changes – seem likely to be reinforced. A few factors such as infrastructure provision could favour the conurbations but it is unclear whether they have the other assets needed to benefit from this potential advantage. The areas with most relevant assets and few definite obstacles to reaping benefits are the Higher-Skill Towns: that said, the broader picture seems likely to be a further widening of the gap between north and south due to the unique role of London and its wider region in technology-enabled economic growth.

Globalisation is enabled by advances in information and communication technology, and its continuation is almost as certain as is further technological development. Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra (2010) outline its key dynamics and the selective nature of its spatial impacts, revealing clear echoes of the summary above of which northern areas may be most affected by technology development. The areas expected to gain most from intensifying global trade patterns have strong human capital shown by skill and entrepreneurship levels – favouring Higher-Skill Towns – whilst the importance of infrastructure may favour the largest urban centres.

Another factor that tends to enable areas to have a positive response to globalisation is strong local and/or regional governance. Strength here means not only cohesive but also relatively powerful. Cohesive governance at sub-national level has long been lacking in England and as yet there is only just a possibility that a turning point may have been reached in those parts of the North such as Greater Manchester where the new opportunity to create multi-area agreements is being trialled. This is a long way from the sort of arrangements developed over many years now in some metropolitan regions elsewhere in Europe (Cadell et al 2008). Probably even worse than the lack of cohesiveness is the relative powerlessness of English local government. In this context what is meant by power is what Rodríguez-Pose (2009) identifies as key: freedom and resources to pursue distinctive policies suited to the local situation. Instead it seems – as discussed below – more likely that central government will further constrain local government in order to cut public spending. The spatial impacts within the North are likely to include large urban areas losing the opportunity to gain from globalisation due largely to cuts in public spending on infrastructure.

Central government in Britain needing to cut public spending was a key consequence of the global financial crisis identified by Tomaney (2010). The less prosperous parts of the North that predominate in the conurbations and Lower-Skill Towns have previously been major beneficiaries of public spending and thus are at the greatest risk of suffering from this change. In particular, Core Cities have gained from growth in public funding, especially through its underpinning of regeneration achieved via land and property development. Investment by the private sector has been severely choked off and is expected to be very cautious in returning, to housing development most especially. This will work itself out spatially with the longest delays to renewed investment affecting the least “prime” areas of the North viz: the poorest areas. At the same time, the initially anticipated direct impact of the financial crisis – the greatest job losses being in the financial sector which tends to be heavily represented in the more affluent areas – has not materialised in practice. In summary, the spatial impact within the North of the

global financial crisis seems likely to be a widening of the gulf between the more prosperous Higher-Skill Towns (together with many Rural Areas) as against the most acutely affected disadvantaged areas that include most other urban areas.

Public finance also loomed large in the discussions of the impacts of demographic change by Boden and Rees (2010). There is pressure for public spending increases due to the needs of a growing population of the very old. Setting aside the possibility of a substantial rise in the employment rate of those who are younger (in part through raising the pensionable age), the need to increase the numbers paying taxes as well as to maintain the labour force generally calls for a larger young migrant net inflow. How likely this will be must partly depend on just how the global financial crisis plays out in future years across different countries.

Within the North, Boden and Rees (op cit) emphasise that Rural Areas are where the current dynamics of natural change and selective migration are producing the most acute ageing trends. Although the fiscal problems referred to above are at present not localised – because central government funds most health and care provision directly or indirectly – this might change as part of a strategy to cut public spending. As for the foreseen need for higher net in-migration flows, here too earlier research suggests that future patterns build on the imprint of the past. Flows of new migrants have a tendency to go, at least initially, to areas where there are earlier migrants from the same part of the world: this was even true of the seemingly unprecedented inflow of central and eastern European migrants following the expansion of the European Union in 2004 (Coombes et al, 2007). It seems likely that the consequence will be a further differentiation between the more ethnically diverse large urban areas and the smaller towns and rural parts of the North. Boden and Rees (op cit) show that increased public funding need is associated with ethnic diversity due to higher birth rates and greater probability of deprivation. This risk would be widespread across the Core Cities and Constrained Urban areas, with some Lower-Skill Towns also at risk.

Gibbs (2010) suggests that most of the North face few immediate challenges from climate change. That said, some low-lying eastern areas are prone to suffer in the longer term from rising sea levels, while drier summers will affect some agriculture. These effects mostly impact on selected Rural Areas and, in general, the selectivity of potential impacts is highlighted on the positive side, too. Opportunities to gain from any “green new deal” may depend on existing skills and sectors that currently are minor parts of the economic landscape in any part of the North. Gibbs (op cit) sees a more indirect employment creation opportunity in the need to greatly improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock, but this may well be stalled by public spending constraints.

A more fundamental response to climate change would be a radical reversal of the long-term growth in personal mobility (Schäfer et al, 2009). This scenario sees local areas once again being largely self-contained in that they provide their populations with a large share of their employment and service needs, so reducing the need to travel. The negative impact would be on Core Cities which would lose incoming service users, whilst the Constrained Urban category could be among the greatest gainers due to creating and retaining more local income streams. Lowe and Ward (op cit) set out this scenario of greater self-containment in Rural Areas as one end of a spectrum of possibilities. Of all the speculations discussed so far, this may be the clearest turning point of all: to reverse the trend to greater interaction between areas – intimately linked with urbanisation among other basic processes (Storper, 2009) – would be a seismic shift that seems unlikely given the arguments here about inertia and path dependency.

Conclusion

This final section of the paper pulls together, for each area type in turn, the various points made in the discussions above of the spatial implications of the turning points.

Core Cities are possibly the most distinctive area type, although this is not to ignore notable contrasts among the five northern Core Cities which range from the steady “success story” of Leeds to the well-known difficulties found in most of the others. Beyond these generalisations there are also the strong inequalities which are found within any large city, which even Leeds is fully subject to (Stillwell and Shepherd, 2004). Both globalisation patterns and possible differentiation by level of telecommunication infrastructure were seen to give Core Cities some economic potential absent in other parts of the North. Yet the key here is the word “potential” which shifts attention to the importance of high-level human capital and associated outcomes such as the level of entrepreneurship. The strong contingency associated with the prospects for large cities is shown by Champion and Townsend (2009) because the “long boom” in fact produced very uneven growth rates. The wide socio-economic divides in Core Cities can lead them to rely on a small, highly talented group within their potential workforce who may seize the new opportunities. Not only is this group rather small in these cities it can also be highly mobile (Champion et al, 2007), which leads to the recent policy emphasis on attracting and retaining talented individuals.

Part of the policy response in the Core Cities has been major physical regeneration, especially of the city centre where there has also been provision of new-style housing for young professionals: one effect of the financial crisis is expected to be a virtual stand-still of such development by both public and private sectors. At the opposite end of the social spectrum, the wide divide within Core Cities means they also include major concentrations of deprivation and – so far as these are associated with the presence of ethnic minority groups – then the anticipated rise in net international in-migration may lead to a growing need for public spending at a time of public expenditure restraint. One of the few growth mechanisms that the largest cities could rely on in the past has been the increasing concentration of higher order services there. If there were radical reductions in personal mobility as a way of limiting climate change then this Core Cities growth motor would go into reverse.

The other side of the same coin is that this, admittedly unlikely, prospect of radically reduced personal mobility would see Constrained Urban areas benefit. Their very definition here was based on them seeing a large – and growing – loss to their local services by people travelling further to larger cities instead. The proximity of the larger cities may bring some benefits to the Constrained Urban areas, though, if the wider urban regions exploit advantages such as superior infrastructure provision. More generally, these advantages are identified as agglomeration economies (Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra op cit) but these are no guarantee of economic growth. In fact the evidence of several recent decades in the North is that its conurbations have only very rarely seen growth rates above the national average. Worse still, it is likely that the Constrained Urban areas tend to rely on “trickle down” growth from the Core Cities in particular, so unless they create unprecedented levels of growth it is difficult to see prosperity spreading across whole conurbations. If areas like Hackney failed to share in the very rapid growth that occurred a few kilometres away in the City of London and Docklands then just how rapidly would Leeds have to grow to provide prosperity for a city region that extends to Halifax 20 kilometres away?

The emphasis on potential “spillover” economic growth here is not misplaced because the indigenous growth prospects of Constrained Urban areas are weak. They are typified by low levels of human capital and a high dependence on branch plants, exacerbated now by an off-shoring risk to the recent growth in contact centre or data

processing work. The implications of economic decline could be greater when less public finance is available for the unemployment-related transfer payments many of these areas already rely relatively heavily upon. More pessimistic prospects could include a loss of social cohesion if resentment at economic distress gets diverted into hostility over growing ethnic diversity.

Very similar challenges face many of the numerous Lower-Skill Towns of the North, although not all have the same high levels of ethnic diversity. Whilst they share most of the problems that Constrained Urban areas are presented with, they do not share all the potential advantages enjoyed by the latter type of area. The key differences stem from location. As explained above, being close to a larger centre through being part of a wider conurbation may bring growth diffused outwards from the larger city. By contrast, Lower-Skill Towns are more free-standing and so more reliant on growth which they have fostered internally. By the same token, if they do succeed in creating growth internally then it is less likely to be diffused to other areas than would be the case for an area with intensive interactions with near neighbours. Pike et al (2006) reviewed the benefits and disadvantages of being a more self-contained area and concluded that in itself it is broadly neutral in its impact, although areas that are more self-contained may be prone to more extreme peaks and troughs because of their more limited interaction with other areas.

This relatively high self-containment – with its attendant risks and potential rewards – is shared by the Higher-Skill Towns as identified here. Their definitive characteristic of relatively high-level human capital may make these areas attractive to potential inward investors in high value-added sectors that can exploit new technologies and, as these towns tend not to be in more remote coastal locations, so may gain access to improved infrastructure quite soon after a roll-out has reached a Core City (eg. North Cheshire gaining from its proximity to the conurbations of the North West). Another aspect of higher level human capital is that it is associated with stronger potential for entrepreneurship, so these areas also have more prospects for indigenously derived growth. It is important here to ask why certain areas have become Higher-Skill Towns when others have not. Common factors, found in different combinations among these modestly sized towns or cities, include the presence of a university for at least 30 years, location on main national transport routes, and attractive urban fabric. This is relevant because such attributes do not change quickly, so the attractivity (Fotheringham et al 2000) of the areas to more mobile talented people may persist too. This suggests the Higher-Skill Towns are likely to continue renewing their human capital advantage over most other areas.

Although the land-based sectors now employ just a small proportion of the population in northern Rural Areas, they are notable here in that agriculture may be the northern industry most directly susceptible to climate change. That said, adaptation has been a key to the economic survival of farming for many years past. Some remoter areas have reduced their relative peripherality by utilising the internet in a range of ways, but as expectations of very high-level broadband provision rise they may be on the wrong side of a digital divide because it will not be profitable for providers to supply the highest grade infrastructure to small and/or distant settlements. A more social aspect of the digital divide exists between younger and older people: this is relevant here, too, because Rural Areas are on track to be the first parts of the North where the very old become a substantial proportion of the population. This is one way in which many rural communities are increasingly dependent on urban areas: they need the care and health facilities that are more efficiently located there. To date it has also been feasible for rather younger people to move to more rural locations and then commute to work in urban areas (cf. Champion et al, 2009). This behaviour may become less plausible as policy develops to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, at this point the discussion may have strayed too far into pure speculation, perhaps attracted by the self-contained Rural

Areas scenario of Lowe and Ward (op cit) which may have much to recommend it, but cannot easily be seen as a likely future. Militating against such radical changes are the deeply-rooted trends that have been emphasised here as a crucial part of grounding speculations on turning points in the reality of the highly persistent contrasts between the differing parts of the North.

To summarise: the spatial implications of the turning points mostly reinforce existing differentials such as that between Core Cities and Constrained Urban areas nearby, and between the Higher-Skill Towns and the Lower-Skill Towns in much of the North. Yet the notion of turning points prompts speculation about transformative change: could there not be such major changes that large numbers of areas shift from one type to another, or even that the typology might become out-moded? One example of such a transformative change in settlement patterns was provided in the last century by the New Towns policy which created several substantial northern towns, some times on “green field” sites to all intents and purposes. For the foreseeable future the constraints on public expenditure seem to rule out a revival of any such policy which was exceptional in its scale, and even the far more modest policy innovations such as growth points may have to be restricted.

Another form of unprecedented change that may occur is by the emergence of some exceptionally favoured area whose assets are crucial to a new development process. The problem here, of course, is that it is usually only in retrospect that research can identify the key advantage underpinning rapid prosperity growth in that one area. For example, research on the “Cambridge phenomenon” sought to explain a pattern which had already emerged: there was no prior prediction this pattern would emerge (Wicksteed, 2000). Even so, the exceptional assets of Cambridge might have been identified before the growth took place, given that Cambridge houses one of the strongest concentrations of scientific knowledge in the world. It is difficult to identify parts of the North that will feature in relevant global “top ten” lists of cities or regions. The more positive side of the same coin is that few if any parts of the North are likely to feature in global “bottom ten” lists either. The North of England does not include places that are, for example, among the most endangered by flooding from rising sea levels or shrinking fresh water supplies. The possible candidates for inclusion in such lists of threatened areas may be heavy process centres like Teesside that may face radical change as part of the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Thus the tentative conclusion is that transformative change to the settlement pattern of the North is unlikely. The arguments here have emphasised continuity in many differentials between places, and the review of turning points tended to find reasons for these differentials being reinforced rather than eroded. Put another way, it seems unlikely that there will be fundamental shifts to the balance between the attractions and disadvantages of different types of place that persistently shape the location choices of economic activity and talented people (cf. Boschma and Fritsch, 2009).

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