

Europeanization and the English Regions

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Europeanization and the English Regions¹

In this paper we attempt to explore and apply Europeanization to the regional level in England. We begin with some remarks on what we take Europeanization to be. The way we have approached the concept and its definition is to regard it as fundamentally concerned with the study of change as it affects issues, perceptions, institutions and policies. But distinctively we are dealing with a particular kind or example of change which is evident through what might be termed 'the EU effect'. That is change that would not have happened or would not have happened in the way it has if it were not for the existence of arrangements and relationships consequent upon the establishment and development of the EU. So a starting point for our analysis is that Europeanization concerns the nature of and the processes whereby this EU effect is manifested. In developing our definition further we start with a formula utilized in an earlier paper adapted from work by Radaelli (2000: 4). In this earlier work Europeanization was defined as:

A set of processes through which the EU political, social and economic dynamics interact with the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies (Bulmer and Burch 2002: 116)².

This is a good starting definition but it is rather parsimonious. It can be developed further in order to encompass both the regional tier and additional points on Europeanization which have arisen in the more recent literature on the topic. Consequently in this paper we define Europeanization as:

The study of the ways in which and the extent to which EU political, social and economic dynamics interact with [and shape] the patterns of discourse and identities and the nature of polities, institutions and public policies at supra-national (EU), national and sub-national levels.

This definition enables us to encompass a number of points which seem relevant to any attempt to utilize the concept of Europeanization, especially in relation to the regional tier. First, the word 'interact' indicates that while Europeanization requires that the EU element is primary, that there can be no Europeanization without Europe, there is both a top-down and a bottom-up aspect to it. There is at least a two-way interaction involved and that this interaction is iterative and cumulative. This is captured in such notions as 'reception and projection' as applied to Europeanization in the operation of member state governments in the EU (Bulmer and Burch 2000) and 'up-loading' and 'down

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² Radaelli's original definition read "A set of processes through which the EU political, social and economic dynamics become part of the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies" (Radaelli 2000: 4). In later work his definition is elaborated further.

loading' as applied to Europeanization in policy development within a multi-level EU (Borzal 2001; Howell 2002). Second, the term 'supra-national (EU)' level should be understood in two senses: as covering (a) inter-governmental relations and (b) EU institutions. It seems to us that any Europeanizing effects may emanate amongst member states collectively, or amongst a group of them, as well as amongst the supra-national structures and processes of the EU.

Third, more broadly, the notion of 'levels' gives recognition to the interactive, multi-level nature of the European project and that horizontal as well as vertical forces and relationships need to be taken into account in any assessment of Europeanization. This is an essential perspective in any attempt to draw regions into the analysis so that the EU effect can be engendered and developed across member states at national level or even sub-national level. This enables us to introduce a new notion – which for the moment let us call 'cross-loading' - whereby a practice may be spread, horizontally, across a level. Clearly, following on our remarks in the initial paragraph of this paper, this is still a form of Europeanization. One can visualize a sequence of Europeanization where initiatives begin across, say, nation state horizontal level, i.e. are cross-loaded (perhaps initially through bi-laterals, followed by coalition building and creation of a majority) and are then, vertically, up-loaded to be endorsed at EU level and are then down-loaded in a more precise format to the sub-national level. Indeed, that is not an unrealistic account of how things often work. Of course all the other sequencing of levels in tracing initiatives are also possible as is a mixing of levels and vertical and horizontal forces in the course of initiating, developing and carrying through 'Europeanized' issues, perceptions, institutions and policies. Indeed our emphasis on change recognises the extent to which this is a dynamic process within which manifestations of Europeanization may be taking place at different levels at different times. In a general sense not all levels will be equally significant. The EU level has a sort of higher status in that it is through this level that initiatives need to pass, if only to be legitimated, in order to be unambiguously accorded as Europeanized. Moreover, an initial cross-loading at the sub-national level seems the least likely because of the limited placing of this level in the formal architecture of the EU project, but it is nevertheless an avenue for Europeanization - as we will see in the later part of the paper.

Fourth the phrase 'the extent to which' indicates that ideally an approach to Europeanization needs to give some attention to the challenging research design issues of a) isolating the Europeanizing effect from other effects and b) how to determine the degree of Europeanization that is taking place. Responding to a) is quite tricky and it is a point we will come back to in the conclusion to this paper. Except to note at this point that our earlier definition of an 'EU effect' offers a way of beginning to tackle this issue. Dealing with the *degree* of Europeanization is potentially more manageable. It requires establishing and applying criteria for evaluating the scale of the effect. We outline the ones we apply in this paper later in this introductory section.

Fifth, 'polities' and 'institutions' are introduced. These are concepts we have used in a larger project in which we are engaged and our research from which we draw on in providing the empirical material in the bulk of this paper (Bulmer and Burch, 2000 and 2002; Bulmer et al 2002). More pertinently, as far as this exercise is concerned, they offer general categories within which one can plot and across which one can evaluate the extent of Europeanization. In essence the categories drawn in under both labels have some similarity to what Radaelli terms 'political structure', though his emphasis is largely upon domestic political structures (Radaelli, 2000: 7-9)

In the following analysis we attempt to plot Europeanization and its impact on the English regions. We explore the extent of Europeanization across various institutional dimensions and components of the polity. We do not in this paper explore changes in discourse and identity – though we accept these are important and we do touch on matters concerning them from time to time. We distinguish five components of the polity:

- Electoral
- civil society (*includes political parties, pressure groups, NGOs and elite networks, etc*)
- representative (or parliamentary)
- political executive (or ministerial)
- bureaucratic (the civil service)

Along each of these broad components Europeanization can be plotted. But the bulk of our analysis involves examination of Europeanization at a more detailed level by looking its impact on institutions. We see institutions as having four dimensions along which Europeanization can be evaluated. Thus we look at

Europeanization along:-

- the *systemic dimension*: affecting the constitutional rules and the framework of the state and government;
- the *organizational dimension*: affecting the formal structure of offices and key positions, and including the distribution of formal authority and resources of money and staff;
- the *regulative dimension*: affecting rules, guidelines and operating codes and also the capacity for strategic guidance (i.e. the means to ensure that tasks are fulfilled and that forward thinking is undertaken);
- the *process dimension*: affecting the processes whereby business is handled, information distributed and policy decisions determined; and including the networks established to fulfil these tasks;

We also look at Europeanization affecting the *cultural* aspects of institutions – the norms and values relating to activities across all these dimensions. For example, there can be Europeanization of accepted values about how processes should work, who should be involved in this or that activity, what rules should apply and so forth.

In determining the degree of Europeanization we adopt (for now) Radaelli's categorization of four possible outcomes – inertia, absorption, transformation and retrenchment. Inertia is “lack of change”, absorption is “change as adaptation”, transformation is “paradigmatic change” involving change in the “fundamental logic of political behaviour”, and retrenchment is when “national policy becomes less European than it was” (Radaelli 2000: 13-14). In the following pages we examine Europeanization in the English regions in two phases. In Phase 1 European forces are at the very centre of change. In the second phase, post 1997, the picture is more complex.

Europeanization and the Emergence of "New English Regionalism": 1991-97

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the direct Europeanizing effect of the Structural Funds on the emergence of sub-regional governance in England. The requirements for formulating and implementing ERDF and ESF spending programmes had a significant administrative impact and a more modest regionalizing effect. Indeed, a 2003 report on cohesion policy implies that administrative changes associated with the implementation of European programmes have sometimes appeared to absorb more of the Commission and Member States' attention than the content and strategic priorities of the actual funding programmes (European Commission 2003: 7).

Alongside the galvanizing effect of European funding programmes, a wellspring of change had already begun to rise in certain English regions at the end of the 1980s. Local elites in parts of northern England and other 'peripheral' areas had long complained about inter-regional economic disparities and the failure of national policy to address them. Dissatisfaction eventually prompted action as elites in the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and Humber began to explore alternative routes to dealing with regeneration and attracting financial support. This 'new English regionalism' had practical and pragmatic roots and began to emerge from the bottom-up. With the exception of the North East, it lacked popular foundations (Burch and Rhodes 1993: 3-4; Burch and Gomez 2002: 769). But it did represent the start of a tentative process of growing regional awareness, giving tangible expression to the case for reform and providing a platform to take that case forward.

In effect in the early nineties two trends came together: a more regionally focused EU funding policy coupled with a bottom-up regional awareness and concern. This was the critical moment from which the new pattern of English regionalism began to emerge. The pattern of change thereafter is spasmodic but persistent and it is manifested across all institutional dimensions. The requirements of European funding initiatives are at the very heart of these changes, though the degree of change varies significantly across the English regions.

Europeanization and Systemic change

Changes in the structure of the state affecting the English regions were minimal before 1997. Regionalism was not encouraged by successive Conservative governments which had gradually reduced the powers of local authorities while simultaneously enhancing the authority of the centre and QUANGOs (Stoker 1996). In territorial terms, London's dominance of the economic and political map of the UK continued unabated. European Union policy-making was tightly controlled from Whitehall. Even where developments in the EU's Structural Funds regulations stipulated that regional players should participate in decision making and delivery processes, the centre maintained a powerful role as gatekeeper (Bache 1999). The potential Europeanizing effect of EU regional policy was mediated through central government institutions which had proved adept at absorbing (and adapting to) the impact of European integration on their own terms (Bulmer and Burch 2000: 9).

Despite the deeply entrenched dominance of the centre in the UK system, one development retrospectively stands out during the 1990s in the emergence of English regional structures. The creation of nine Integrated Regional Offices, later to become Government Offices for the Regions (GOs), in April 1994 was part of the Major government's manifesto pledge to strengthen the coordination of policies at regional and urban levels (Mawson and Spencer 1995: 14). On the face of it, the GOs initiative served to bolster the centre's presence on the ground at regional level. It would be overstressing the case to suggest that the GOs reflected a shift in values on the part of decision makers at the centre. The evidence is that the interests of the regions remained secondary and were often seen as non-problematic. Yet the establishment of the GOs unintentionally aided the development of regionalism in at least three ways. First, it linked the notions of integrated policy and regional delivery in the minds of Whitehall decision makers. Second, it encouraged the development of regionally focused interest networks. And third, it gave a push to regional identities by finally establishing what were to become accepted as the standard boundaries for the English regions. These effects were marginal in impact to begin with but they constituted a shift in the principles underlying state organization at the sub-national level. Although there is a Europeanizing element in this, in essence these changes reflect domestic factors. In effect, the first steps had been taken towards more extensive changes that were to follow later in the decade.

Europeanization and Organizational change

The impact of Europeanization on the English regions was more discernible at the organizational level. It principally manifested itself in the adaptation of the emerging regional tier to involvement in Structural Funds programmes. Much of the formal authority remained with Whitehall but regions were more systematically drawn into the formulation and implementation of individual programmes. There were also

early signs of the potential transformative impact of Europeanization as regional players adapted to the decision-making processes and methods of working required by the Structural Funds regulations.

It was, however, the creation of the Government Offices which provided the principal organizational innovations up to 1997. As noted above these mainly reflected domestic forces and pressures though in some regions there was a significant European element to their work. This mainly revolved around their role in the Structural Funds programmes. Consequently it was the GOs in those regions which were in receipt of the larger amounts of funds that were initially the most engaged in relation to European issues. They played a key role in co-ordinating the regional input into and in drawing up the Single Programming Documents (SPDs) for the 1994-98 round and were designated as the managing authority for ERDF programmes under Objectives 1, 2 and 5b (Wells 1995: 11). The granting of Objective 1 status to Merseyside led to the creation of a separate Government Office for the area. Despite the GOs' involvement in the formulation of the SPDs, the final product tended to reflect the preferences of the centre more than those of regional actors (Wells 1995: 12; Bache 1998: 99). However, there is also evidence that indicates a change in the centre-region balance of power resulting from the Government Office initiative. In the North West and Yorkshire and Humber, for instance, the GO acquired a reputation for helping to pull together sub-regional interests. The European Secretariat for ERDF in both regions exercised a good deal of autonomy in determining how the programmes were to be implemented and they quickly and effectively adapted to the 'partnership' culture that was an operational requirement of the exercise. In more general terms, the day-to-day relationships between GO officials and other regional players together with the GOs' practice of seconding personnel from local government and other economic and social partners promoted a process of learning with and about each other which was focused on a regional perspective rather than local or national ones. So, while the centre continued to hold sway over policy, a subtle shift in emphasis towards the regional tier had begun. The practice of dealing with EU funding programmes played a key part in this shift, though its impact was more substantial in some regions than in others.

A related set of organizational changes was also evident in the civil society component of the emerging regional polity. Specifically, this period saw the formation of regionally based groupings drawing together the voluntary and private sectors and others from the public sector. Again, the Structural Funds were significant here. For the European Commission, the formulation and delivery of ERDF development strategies was heavily dependent on information exchange with sub-national actors. To fulfil this demand sub-national bodies had to develop more of a regional focus and began to concentrate more lobbying and information gathering capacities at that level (Burch and Gomez 2002: 772). A further indicator of the increase in sub-national lobbying activity was the opening of 17 sub-national offices in Brussels during early 1990s (John 1994: 739). Individual cities, local authorities and local authority-related organizations were first onto the scene.

Regional organizations tended to 'piggy-back' on their efforts (Burch and Gomez 2002).

Responses to these Europeanizing effects differed across England and were reflected in variations in the pattern and extent of activity of individual regions. In the North West, for instance, a North West Regional Association, drawing together all the local authorities in the region, was formed in 1992. It, along with business interests, in 1994 formed the North West Partnership, an umbrella body drawing together all North West focused interest organizations including those covering the voluntary sector, trade unions and further and higher education (Burch and Holliday 1993; Jones and McLeod 2002: 181; Giordano: 2002; 86). These developments were directly encouraged by the EU Commission (DG XVI) and were significantly shaped by involvement in Structural Funds activities. In the South West, in contrast, interests remained organized largely on a sub-regional basis reflecting the inherent division between Cornwall in the far south west, the middle South West of Devon, Somerset and Bristol and the outer south west of Dorset and Gloucestershire. Both regions had problems about identity and boundaries, but in the South West these concerns were more acute and the impact of structural funds was not enough of an incentive for players to come together at the regional level.

Europeanization and Changes in Processes

Along the process dimension the effect of Europeanization was similarly limited, testament in part to the limited involvement of the English regions in UK European policy making. There was a varied (across regions), but persistent pattern of change in the processes for disseminating information, handling business and reaching decisions at regional level in England. However, regions were not in any substantial sense an integrated part of the UK government's policy processes. In regard to regional input into the UK's European policy making, this was largely restricted to the regional development parts of the Structural Funds. Again the pattern of involvement varied across regions according to the volume of the Structural Funds allocated. Even on these matters representatives of interests in the more engaged regions were largely drawn into the processes for formulating the CSF and allocating funding through membership of the Programme Monitoring Committees (PMCs). Power to designate and to take key decisions about the programmes rested with central governments. But the partnership principle clearly encouraged sub-national participation and assisted the creation of new, regionally focused, policy communities (Bache 1998: 103). The programming concept complemented partnership by setting out a procedural map for the negotiation of multi-annual plans and there were, in particular, two aspects of this which encouraged the emergence of regional players and structures. Firstly, implementing authorities had to be consulted by the Commission and member governments during this complex and lengthy process. Secondly, the 5-year time frame of the plans ensured continuity and stability for the participants in the funding process. The

series of reforms to the ERDF between 1988 and 1993 thus provided one of the significant drivers for regional engagement, albeit with varying outcomes across the English regions partly depending on the scale of the funds allocated.

This more regionalized process for handling Structural Funds issues had begun to emerge from about 1991 onwards. While in keeping with the requirements of the EU, the process was very much run from the centre downwards. However, significant roles were played by central government's civil servants in the region initially through their separate department's regional outposts and, from 1994, through the integrated GOs. In essence, during the period from 1991 to 1997 this policy process was established and had begun to bed down and to operate over a long-term basis in most of the major Structural Funds regions. The position of regional players in this process, though it firmed up over the period, remained tenuous and largely dependent on EU requirements. Over-time it became clear that regional input could be helpful and constructive. The distribution of information concerning the formulation of Structural Funds negotiating strategy (a matter for the DTI) and the final decisions re the CSF for each region largely by-passed regional players. Indeed, the processes for involving them in these matters tended to be consultative rather than decision taking.

The operation of the Structural Funds programmes and the gradual regionalization of the policy process engendered new networks of players, a development which is characteristic of Europeanization (Kohler Koch 1999). Regional players were drawn, if rather haphazardly, into the information web from central government and the GOs, and into shaping the handling of policy. These networks, as well as engaging civil servants from central and regional level, also drew in representatives from interests such as business and local authorities. Yet again the pattern of networks and the extent to which they were developed varied across the regions. Moreover, these new networks operated at elite level and away from the gaze of the public and the media. Importantly there was a self-reinforcing effect to the whole set of developments. As the members of this newly galvanized regional elite worked together they developed shared understandings and a collective sense of purpose. This in turn helped to further establish the processes they were engaged in and to cement the personal linkages that increasingly helped to hold the network together. Of course the pattern varied across England according to the magnitude of the Structural Funds allocated to the region, the attitudes of key players, especially in the GOs, and the extent to which interests within the region were able to operate with a regional focus. In effect, regions fell into two categories: those with the most developed regional processes and networks (the NE, NW and Merseyside, Y&H, and WM) and those with the least (EM, SW, SE, EE). In this as in most other instances, London was a special case, both in its limited degree of overt regionalization and its extensive degree of access to key policy making points and personnel.

Europeanization and Regulative change

The strongest Europeanizing effects in the first phase occurred at the regulative level where operating practices changed as a direct result of the obligations imposed by the Structural Funds regulations. Most significantly, these included rules and guidelines covering both the creation of spending frameworks and the allocation of funding. The requirement of partnership and the regionalization of planning frameworks had a lasting impact on the handling of European business in the English regions. Two principles introduced in the 1988 and 1993 reforms to the European Regional Development Fund – partnership and programming – highlight this point. The partnership concept, incorporated in the 1988 Framework Regulation, codified a Commission commitment to the inclusion of sub-national actors that had existed since the foundation of EU regional policy in the 1970s. It required tripartite consultation between the Commission, Member States and designated sub-national authorities in the formulation of development plans, the implementation of programmes and the monitoring and evaluation process. All member state governments were required to follow the guidelines laid down by the relevant regulations, though in the English case, the exact interpretation of these guidelines did have a Whitehall spin put upon them. Nevertheless, the broad thrust of these requirements substantially originated in the EU (Regulation 2052/88 EEC). Many of the changes along the regulative dimension also concerned informal regulation: understandings about how things should operate and who should do what. These tended to build up over the period amongst those participants from the public and private sector at both national and regional level that were drawn into the operation of the new structures. Involvement in structural funds activities played a significant part in this socializing process.

The capacity to provide strategic guidance and initiative remained at the national government level, though the GOs' ability to provide some resource towards this task and to give it a regional focus had been enhanced. The extent to which this was exploited depended on how the GO interpreted its role in the region and, in turn, how responsive regional actors were. The partnership principle as applied to the Structural Funds was important here, but it was not the only factor. It was more easily developed in some regions than in others depending in part on the extent of prior experience in applying the concept. In the North West the partnership principle was already practised at sub-regional level. There had already been a number of partnership based regeneration schemes especially in relation to Greater Manchester which tried to tie them in to larger schemes such as two bids to host the Olympic games which were developed from 1985 onwards (Cochrane, Peck and Tickell 2002: 99-101). This experience was built on and expanded out into the wider territory of the region. In the South West there was less of a sense of regional identity and less experience of partnership approaches. Despite the existence of a GO for the South West the area really retained its sub-regional character throughout the period up until 1997 (Bridges 2002: 97). Unlike the North West the experience gained from the local level was not transferred upwards. A further factor in determining the extent of regionally based initiative was the attitude of civil servants in regional offices. The appointment of a Whitehall civil

servant to head the North West GO from its inception was in part designed to overcome the tendency, as perceived in Whitehall, that staff in the separate departments of the region had 'gone native'. What was emerging was not so much codes or rules but a set of attitudes and working practices which gave more scope to the regional level and which were gradually becoming more and more established over time. What was not yet clear was the extent to which this new regionalized approach would be allowed by the centre to develop further and be drawn more fully into a wider range of policy making.

Europeanization and the creation of regional institutions: 1997-2003

The impact of Europeanization in the second phase was secondary to constitutional change in the UK. Labour's victory in the 1997 general election heralded a series of far-reaching constitutional reforms. Key manifesto pledges to move ahead with devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and to create a Greater London Authority were fulfilled while the incoming government's positive attitude towards the EU paved the way for more constructive engagement on European issues. The launch of the devolution process precipitated an intensive period of institution-building and adaptation. It also gave 'critical momentum' to the development of English regional governance (Burch and Gomez 2002: 776). Yet the English regions outside London found themselves left behind as the UK began 'to reinvent itself internally' (Morgan 2002: 807). New institutions – Regional Development Agencies and consultative Regional Chambers – were established in Labour's first term but they fell some way short of the expectations of English devolutionists. European issues became a growing concern for RDAs and Chambers, although the structures and processes for handling European matters greatly varied across the English regions. The general pattern post 1997 was one of gradual adaptation as the new institutional players came to terms with the European agenda. The Structural Funds continued to be an important push factor in the changing picture of regional governance and the key source of Europeanization. But after 1997 constitutional change in the UK became the primary driving force behind the emerging English regionalism. European factors remained important but they were secondary to domestically derived pressures and initiatives.

Europeanization and Systemic change

It is difficult to discern any direct EU effect on the important systemic changes that took place post 1997. The most important change in the structure of the state was the creation in 1999 of nine Regional Development Agencies, one for each English region plus London. On paper, the range of powers accorded to Agencies was modest. The White Paper in which their responsibilities were set out was studiously vague about their European policy functions (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1997: 45). The document suggested, for instance, that the Agencies should play a leading role in a new round of Structural Funds programmes but did not lay down clear guidelines

about the powers that they might exercise in that area. However, the roles that the Agencies were to play in economic regeneration – they were tasked with drawing up regional economic development strategies – inevitably drew them into the European funding process.

The government also created 8 Regional Chambers alongside the RDAs and an elected Mayor and 25-member assembly for London (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1998). The eight Regional Chambers, being consultative only, with hardly any powers and resources and with members appointed by central government, can be judged to have had only a marginal impact on the structure of the state. They were established on a voluntary basis and were tasked with scrutinizing the activities of the Development Agencies. Many of the new Chambers quickly redesignated themselves as Regional Assemblies, though they were un-elected and their membership was appointed largely from amongst local authority councillors. The RDAs and Assemblies were designated to cover the areas in keeping with the already established GO boundaries. The reform thus finally established standardized English regional areas and boundaries. Indeed there was only one slight alteration from the pattern established in 1994: the re-incorporation of Merseyside into the North West.

The creation of a Greater London Authority (GLA) and Mayor was, however, an important change in the structure of the state. It underlined the already privileged position of London in English policy making and gave London decision makers new powers and extra resources which could be used to lobby and influence Whitehall (Pimlott and Rao 2002). The other English regions were denied such powers, although the May 2002 White Paper proposed that they can, if opinion is supportive and a substantially unitary system of local government exists or emerges in the area, move to directly elected Regional Assemblies. If such changes do take place they would constitute a systemic change of some significance (Cabinet Office/Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions 2002).

None of these systemic changes that have taken place or are in the pipeline draw directly on European models or requirements, though they have given a more regional slant to English governance and brought it more into line with EU counterparts. In general these innovations, taken alongside the devolution of powers in Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland, bring the UK model closer to the idea of a 'Europe of the regions'.

Europeanization and Organizational change

The Europeanizing effect on change at the organizational level was also secondary to the impact of devolution and decentralization. Expanded Government Offices (GOs) retained the lion's share of authority in the evolving regional governance system, reflecting the tight control that Whitehall continued to exercise over the regions after 1997. But the creation of the RDAs and, to a lesser extent, the RAs marked the start of a subtle shift in authority as the new organizations began to

exercise their modest range of powers. In particular they began to absorb and adjust to developments in EU policies and legislation. Invariably, European funding programmes had the most direct and substantive influence on the EU-related activities of the regional institutions. However, the new political opportunity structures that resulted from the tentative English devolution process provided a platform from which regional players could engage with a far wider range of European issues such as enlargement, transport and environmental policy. Across the English regions, the paths followed by the Agencies and Assemblies diverged as their individual approaches were adapted to the handling of European business and their other statutory and non-statutory responsibilities. Although this process is still unfolding, it is already clear that the organizational dimension of English devolution is characterized by considerable variety.

Of most significance for the handling of European policy was the incorporation in the GOs of a MAFF (now Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) presence from April 2001. Ongoing reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy in favour of more inclusive rural development, with increased funding earmarked for a range of measures identified in regional plans, meant that the GOs took on a range of new functions in the rural policy sphere. The European dimension of environmental policies also impacts upon the work of the GOs. Implementation of EU Regulations on waste management, for instance, requires coordination at regional level. More broadly, the joined up government initiative has prompted a number of Government Offices to reorganize their European policy arrangements in an effort to ensure that different funding streams, both EU and non-EU, complement each other and that the targets set and actions pursued in different policy areas are mutually compatible (Cabinet Office 1999). In this respect, the Europeansization effect is to act as a driver for more effective internal co-ordination.

As in the earlier phase, management of the Structural Funds remained the dominant European Union related activity of the Government Offices after 1997. Across the board, the GOs again played critical roles in the negotiation of Single Programming Documents (SPDs). The emergence of the Assemblies and RDAs and the scope for more concerted regional level activity that they offered strengthened the GOs' position as the pivot point between regions and Whitehall departments, particularly the Departments of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) – later re-named the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In the North West, for example, stronger cohesion among the partners ensured that collaboration with the GO on the SPD was more formalized than had previously been the case (Burch and Gomez 2002: 773). On the implementation side, the GOs retained their status as the designated managing authority for European funding programmes, responsible for providing the Secretariats for the programmes and for administering applications for funds.

Organizational changes in the handling of the Structural Funds tended to be determined by the level and type of EU funding available to a region in the 2000-06

programmes. In the South West, the designation of Cornwall as an Objective 1 area led to the establishment of a 'partnership' office in Truro, staffed by three Government Office officials and officers from the local authority. The Secretariat for the programme is, however, based in Plymouth. In the North West, Merseyside's Objective 1 programme continued to be handled largely independently of the overall North West effort and is run by a Government Office Secretariat based in Liverpool. An important development after 1997 occurred in the UK's European Social Fund (ESF) programme when the decision making process was significantly altered to give greater scope to the GOs and their regional partners in the operation of the programme. If a pattern has emerged here, it is that the expansion of the GOs' responsibilities *vis-à-vis* European funds has enabled them to become 'more deeply integrated' into regional governance structures (Burch and Gomez 2002: 773).

The lack of clarity about the European policy functions of the RDAs produced considerable regional variations in their internal structures. Most Agencies assigned staff to handle those aspects of Structural Funds programmes for which they were responsible, although the numbers of staff involved were dependent on the type and extent of European funding. However, the Government's decision to hand over to the RDAs the strategic control of Structural Fund programmes by January 2001 provided a strong incentive for RDAs to develop their European activities. Several reorganized their internal arrangements and took on new staff in order to perform this strategic function. Many simultaneously set up programmes to ensure that European issues were 'mainstreamed' across the work of the Agency. The North West Development Agency, for instance, appointed a European operations manager to fulfil these functions and a small team of officials to take forward the development of a regional European strategy. Yorkshire Forward followed a similar path, appointing a strategy team housed in its Strategy and Policy Directorate. All RDAs saw an expansion in the size of their European policy teams and refinement of their internal operations (Gomez and Burch 2002).

European issues, including funding programmes, have had a significant part to play in the way Regional Assemblies operate. In several regions, Assemblies were treated by Government Offices as the source from which local authorities and the 'economic and social partners' were drawn so as to take part in compiling the Single Programming Documents for the 2000-06 round of Structural Funds. This status as the vehicle for drawing together a diverse array of interests at regional level provided a platform for some to expand their European activities. Several either established European policy sub-groups or became involved in new regional forums on European policy. In the North West, the Regional Assembly established a European Affairs 'Key Priority Group' comprising local authority politicians and officials and business representatives to examine European issues on the Assembly's behalf. In the North East, an Assembly Europe Group was charged with carrying out similar tasks. In both regions, one or two policy staff based in the Assembly Secretariat were assigned both to service this machinery and to deal with

issues ranging from work on the Structural Funds programmes to the coordination of regional events concerning the European Union. Across the board the Regional Chambers Fund has provided the means for Assemblies to expand their policy operations by taking on new staff.³ Accordingly, in those regions with the highest receipts of Structural Funds, the number of dedicated European policy staff has risen during the last year or so (Gomez and Burch, 2002).

In other regions, however, the Assemblies have been more peripherally involved in European policy. Where local government associations (LGAs) dominate the regional political map, the role of the Regional Assembly has tended to be that of a forum for discussion or an umbrella for initiatives that involve a broad coalition of actors. In the West Midlands, for instance, the LGA assumed the lead role in coordinating a range of regional European policy initiatives through a 'Portfolio Management Group' of 10 local authority members. A broad based European and International Policy Forum is run under the auspices of the Assembly, though it is serviced by staff from the LGA. In a similar vein, the East Midlands Regional Assembly took on responsibility for the European Strategy Forum, but the staff that service the Forum are based in the East Midlands Regional Local Government Association (EMRLGA) Secretariat. In the South West, which lacks an LGA, the Assembly has no dedicated European affairs group and only one policy officer who deals with European issues as one among several duties. The point here is that it is difficult to discern consistent patterns in the way that Assemblies organize their European activities. The impact of Europeanization has not been strong enough to direct the new regional institutions towards models or templates for handling EU policy. Nevertheless, the partnership concept together with the broader incentives to become involved in EU policy have had distinct organizational effects.

Europeanization was also evident in the decisions of both Development Agencies and Assemblies to establish representations in Brussels close to the heart of EU decision-making. Inevitably, the composition, structure, membership and staffing levels of Brussels offices varied from region to region. In most cases, RDAs and RAs sent their 'own' officials to Brussels, often through jointly funded posts. Few regions, however, have proved able to pull together existing sub-regional representations into a single presence. Only the South West currently operates an office headed by an official that represents the region as a whole. Most have settled for co-location arrangements in which regional officials work alongside officers from local authorities and the economic and social partners. Finance is provided by 'partnerships' of organizations with lines of accountability varying according to the terms of the partnership agreement and their management structures (Gomez and Burch 2002). Annual budgets for operations in Brussels range from £25,000 for the South East's representative to £500,000 each for the West Midlands and London. Staffing levels vary from the four full time officials who

³ The Regional Chambers Fund was created in 2001 to provide £15 million over 3 years. Its purposes were to strengthen the scrutiny function of the Chambers/Assemblies and enable them to further develop their strategic functions. Each of the Chambers/Assemblies would receive £500,000 per annum, with a further £1 million per annum set aside for the English Regions Network, the collective organization for the Chambers.

run the East of England's office to the 8 full time staff and 3 secondees of the West Midlands' operation in Brussels. This constitutes a considerable allocation of resource to enhancing regional to EU level linkages.

The dominant theme of organizational change since 1997 is a more substantial governmental presence in the regions but with great diversity in the way that operates in relation to European issues. Domestic pressures had been the main driver behind these changes, though regional differences in receipts of Structural Funds have clearly been a factor in accounting for the way organizational structures have developed. So too are variations in the management of relationships between the new organizations, local authorities and other sub-regional interests.

Europeanization and Changes in Processes

Procedures for handling European policy in the English regions are very much 'under construction'. As a consequence, it is difficult to assess the extent of the Europeanizing effect. Change has clearly been driven from above, most visibly through the Structural Funds regulations and the practice of engaging with Brussels and London on European issues. It has also originated from below as regional players have identified the need to examine a wider range of European issues and have adapted existing processes to cope with a rapidly evolving European agenda. Although there are some common developments in the processes of policy making, principally those relating to the Structural Funds, there are also wide variations as regions have adopted tailor-made solutions to the handling of European business. The overall picture is therefore a fuzzy one.

Administration and management of European funding programmes has continued to centre on the Programme Monitoring Committees (PMCs), part of the statutory requirement for 'partnership' under the Structural Funds regulations. Representatives from the Assemblies and RDAs appear to have been straightforwardly slotted into this machinery, taking up seats on the PMCs. In the North West, for example, the Assembly's role in bringing together economic and social partners enabled it to secure representation on both the Objective 1 and 2 PMCs. Beneath the PMCs, the networks of working groups that sprung up around specific components of each programme have also taken on a stronger regional hue. With the emergence of a regional tier whose primary functions related to economic development there arose the need to devise processes to ensure congruence between Structural Funds programmes, regional economic strategies and other regional and sub-regional initiatives.

Growing awareness of the broader relevance and implications of European Union policy and legislation coupled with the potentially significant impact of eastern enlargement of the EU also compelled regional and sub-regional players to establish 'overarching' European policy machinery. In this respect, Europeanization has created a coordination imperative. Regional institutions have adopted procedures both to respond to existing issues and to anticipate future

developments. On paper, the PMCs appeared well placed to carry out these tasks. However, they tended to focus on the operational side of the programmes, leaving space for higher-level machinery to develop. Several regions approached this problem by establishing strategic policy groups, albeit with differing compositions and remits. In the South West, the European and International Vision Group (EIVG) comprising representatives from a wide range of sectors was given a similar remit. Other regions opted for rather smaller and less representative groups in the belief that tighter knit groups would be more adept at taking strategic decisions. The North West, under the initiative of the RDA, established a European Strategy Group (ESG) comprising officials from the RDA, RA, Government Office, including the DEFRA representative, the PMCs and an academic advisor (Burch and Gomez 2002: 772). The Group meets several times a year on an ad hoc basis. In the North East, the European Management Board brings together 9 officials from the GO, Assembly and One North East (Development Agency). All 9 regions, including London, now run overarching European policy forums in one form or another.

The need for coordination on EU policy extends beyond the processes that are emerging in individual regions to collective activity among the nine regions and to the relationship between Whitehall and the regional institutions. Regional Directors from the Government Offices hold regular meetings, often in Whitehall, with European policy being one among several subject areas dealt with by the group. Inevitably, this agenda has been dominated by discussion about Structural Funds issues. European policy managers from the RDAs also hold meetings two or three times a year, though an ongoing review of the workings of this group may see it become more informal in its operations. Co-ordination between the Regional Assemblies – achieved through the English Regions Network – is at a somewhat more advanced stage, encouraged by the provision of £15 million over three years from the Regional Chambers Fund. European affairs often feature on the agenda of the network which has examined the Interreg III programme, met with Commission officials and discussed best practice in the handling of Structural Funds. The development of such activity seems likely to continue to accelerate as regional players come to terms with the huge policy implications of eastern enlargement of the EU and its concomitant impact on funding.

There is a Europeanization effect evident in the processes for linking regional institutions to European policy making in Whitehall. By definition, Government Offices are plugged into several Whitehall departments and have long-established formal and informal procedures for communication and information exchange. European funding teams in the Government Offices, for instance, have frequent contact with DTI officials, although there are few formal meetings. The establishment of the Regional Coordination Unit (initially in the Cabinet Office, now in the ODPM) in 2000 was intended to strengthen co-ordination within and across the GOs and provide clear reporting lines to a 'Head' department.⁴ While the RCU has limited direct involvement in European policy in the regions, it does attempt to

⁴ Originally located in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the base of the RCU subsequently switched to the short lived DTLR. It is now housed in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

ensure that targets for the delivery of Structural Funds and other European policies are met, that central government departments and the GOs effectively co-ordinate on EU issues and that the GOs are involved in the policy process at the centre.

Europeanization is also evident in the changes that have taken place in the nature of regional lobbies, the focus of their activities and the way they operate. What John Tomaney (2002: 728) has termed 'quiet regionalization' has accompanied the more visible process centring on the Agencies, Assemblies and Government Offices. The generation of regional strategies on a wide range of issues has prompted other government departments, agencies and NGOs to adapt their structures to reflect their involvement in the preparation and implementation process. On European policy, the implementation of European Regional Development Fund programmes, the European Social Fund and Community Initiatives are the primary drivers behind this element of the regionalization process. The networking activity that is a key feature of EU governance has been further consolidated post 1997. Reorganization of the administration and management of the programmes has forced those bodies that seek funding to work with the new regional institutions. The outcome has been that administrative decentralization in England has provided political opportunity space for sub-regional interests, while European Union policy has offered them a rationale for filling that space.

A recurrent tension running through these developments has been the relationship between sub-regional interests, particularly local authorities, and regional institutions. Reconciling the interests of an extensive and diverse range of actors involved in economic regeneration policy, European funding programmes and the raft of other issues that are played out at regional level has proved to be a difficult exercise. Those officials responsible for the delivery and monitoring of Objective 1 and 2 programmes have had to strike a balance between procedures that are sufficiently open to the input of the 'partners' and the need to make reasonably expeditious decisions about proposals for projects. Similarly, the organizers of strategic European policy machinery have been under pressure from local government and other sub-regional interests to include them in the membership of those forums, an indication of the extent to which partnership working has penetrated the machinery of government.

Europeanization and Regulative Change

The development of formal and informal rules, regulations and guidance relating to English regional governance has been slow. Unlike Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution, the limited process of administrative decentralization to the English regions has not been accompanied by the drawing up of codes of conduct for relationships between the different tiers of government. With much of the decisive authority for policy-making and implementation still resting with Whitehall there has been little need for the formal statements of competencies and dispute settlement rules that are set out in the devolution Concordats and Guidance Notes. Instead, the emphasis has been on the informal and organic development of procedures for linking together institutions in the region and the centre that is in keeping with the

UK's administrative culture. Nevertheless, a small number of rules and regulations have emerged in the handling of European business. They stem from three sources: European Union regulations, changes in Whitehall and agreements between the new regional institutions.

The Structural Funds regulations continue to account for many of the formal rules that govern the handling of European policy in the English regions. Preparation of the 2000-06 round of programmes saw stricter enforcement of rules, especially those associated with the partnership and programming concepts, by the Commission than had previously been the case. For instance, the strategic objectives included in North West's Objective 2 SPD had to be re-drafted at the Commission's insistence in order to comply with amended rules. Greater sensitivity about fraud in the EU following the 1998 reports into maladministration by the Commission resulted in heightened sensitivity about the uptake and expenditure of funds. For instance, the delivery of the programmes is now subject to more rigid controls on the eligibility of projects for funding. Beyond the specific terms of the Structural Funds regulations, other EU legislation has also had a more significant impact on the English regions. One area that has proved particularly problematic in the 2000-06 round of regional development funding has been the more stringent application of state aids rules. Here, regional players and central government must pay close attention to the compatibility of spending proposals with what has become one of the most highly regulated areas of EU activity.

Europe has had some impact on rule making concerning the intra-regional level. Formal frameworks governing relationships between the new organizations established at regional level after 1997 and other regional players have been agreed. This followed some uncertainty about the exact responsibilities and division of powers between the RDAs, Assemblies, GOs and other agencies and interests. For example, the North West Regional Concordat, agreed in 2001 outlines the aims and responsibilities of the Development Agency, Regional Assembly and Government Office, a set of 'common' objectives and a number of guidelines about 'joint working'. The West Midlands has in place a detailed regional concordat laying out the roles and responsibilities of the four key organizations – the Regional Assembly, LGA, Government Office and the RDA – across 16 issue areas. On European policy, the Concordat identifies the lead authorities on the Structural Funds programmes and the region's strategic machinery (European and International Policy Forum) together with the functions of the institutions in relation to the Brussels Office management structure (West Midlands in Europe). Elsewhere, the formal distribution of responsibilities between regional institutions is materializing in the work programmes attached to European strategy documents. The North East's European Action Plan, for example, allocates a wide range of tasks to each institution.

Capacity for strategic guidance on European matters is still firmly located at the centre, but a more substantial role is being played by regional institutions. However, the settling down of the new organizations – RDAs and RAs – into the

existing regional landscape meant that initially, in some regions there was a weakening of the focus of regional efforts with a further proliferation of central government inspired and appointed agencies. It was only once this new pattern of regional provision had been sorted out through such devices as regional concordats and other forms of agreement about who does what and with whom has the strategic capacity of regional players begun to clarify. The position is a strengthened set of resources at the regional level, though how and to what effect these are deployed varies significantly across regions. The most together regions in terms of developing detailed and practical regional European strategies have been the North East and the East of England, though substantial progress has also been made in the North West and Yorkshire and Humber. The Europeanizing effect in this matter, as in others, is evident but varied.

Conclusion

Europeanization is an important factor in both phases in the development of English regions. It is often primary and predominant in the first phase and significant but secondary in the post 1997 period. In some ways in the second period it is more significant in volume terms in that the sum of EU related efforts affecting the development of the English regions is far greater, but this is in the context of an overall expansion of regional activities. So that EU related activities take a bigger slice post 1997, but out of a far larger cake. The general pattern of Europeanization in the English regions is one of gradual but variable adaptation of existing and new institutions to the formal and informal requirements of EU legislation, policies, and working practices. In the terms set out in Radaelli's taxonomy of the outcomes of Europeanization, much of the change has involved the absorption of EU influences. The impact of these has been almost wholly on the civic society and bureaucratic components of the polity - both of which have become more regionalized over the period since 1990. Moreover, the extent of Europeanization and its impact on change clearly differs along the institutional dimensions - systemic, organizational, procedural and regulative - that are the focus of our analysis. In turn, along each institutional dimension there are also considerable variations across the English regions. This variety is a prominent feature of the emerging picture of regional engagement on the European issue.

These variations in part reflect differences in the pattern of regional emergence across England. Pre 1997, a pragmatic 'new English regionalism' emerged in some areas which emphasized economic concerns, was confined to core elites and reflected the specific characteristics of each region. It developed in tandem with the creation of integrated Government Offices in the regions. However, the timing, scope and impact of change in English regional governance was significantly driven by the Structural Funds and thus by the European Union. That continued to be the case after 1997, although the decentralization process launched by the Labour government had a much greater impact on regional

governance. The requirements of European funding programmes have continued to exert a significant impact on institutional configuration during this period. But as the regional tier comes to terms with a broader European agenda, so organizational and procedural diversity has become increasingly pronounced.

Drawing on Radaelli's taxonomy as a basis for determining the degree of Europeanization proves to be unsatisfactory in one important respect. It does not adequately cover the extent of changes that we identify in our analysis. More specifically, it lacks a category to cover potentially important changes in direction or principles that start small but, if sustained, build up over time to be significant. For example, the adjustment of regional players to the partnership and programming concepts was marginally significant to begin with but has had a marked effect on patterns and practices of regional governance in the longer term. Capturing this cumulative effect of change and the possibility that over time it may constitute a transformation of how things are done is not really covered by Radaelli's categories. What might be useful here is a development of the concept of what has been termed 'incremental transformative' change when 'emerging patterns crystallize and become established as a coherent whole which is distinctly different from that which previously existed' (Bulmer and Burch 1998: 605). In other words, there is a dynamic and cumulative quality to change through Europeanization that needs to be integrated into the criteria for evaluating the extent, and especially the scale of Europeanization.

Turning to the sources and effects of Europeanization, in the 1991-7 phase much of the substantive change over the period originated at the regulative level with the new obligations imposed on central government and regional authorities by the Structural Funds regulations of 1988 and 1993. Here, Europeanization had a primary effect on institutional arrangements in the English regions. Important changes in processes and organizations within the regions were a direct result of ERDF decision-making requirements. The programming concept helped to both develop and consolidate the regional tier by creating a clear focus for activities and opportunities for engagement and activism on the part of regional players. Formal requirements to operate on the basis of partnership also exerted a powerful regionalizing effect by forcing those actors involved in delivering Structural Funds programmes to devise new ways of working with sub-national interests. The European effect on systemic change in this period was minimal, a reflection of the limited involvement of English regions in UK European policy-making and the resistance of the UK's governing institutions to change.

In the second phase, the European Union has remained an important influence on the emerging English regional landscape but it has been secondary to central government-led developments. Systemic change affecting the English regions over this period has been extensive but Europeanization has apparently played little part in directly driving this change. The principle source of Europeanization has continued to be the Structural Funds, which have the greatest impact in those regions with the largest allocations. Thus, much

substantive change still emanates from the regulative level and this has had impact at the organizational and process levels. However, as other aspects of European activities and policy have begun to draw in the regions – notably rural development policy and environmental policy – the sources and effects of Europeanization have become more diverse. This has been reflected in the marked increase in EU-related activity within and across the English regions after 1997. Clearly Europeanization has been an important and persistent factor in the story of English regionalism though the full extent of its cumulative effect is still too early to gauge.

At least two conceptual problems arise out of the paper. First, there is the tricky task of distinguishing (or isolating) an EU effect (a Europeanizing effect) from other factors that have driven change. The experiences of the English regions in handling European business suggest that institutional changes attributable in some way to Europeanization can also be attributed to a range of other factors. Consequently, we have to contend with the issues of causality and causal sequence if we are to be more precise about the impact of Europeanization. Second and relatedly, there remains a good deal of debate about the mechanisms of Europeanization. Much of the literature explicitly or implicitly assumes that it is a 'top down' process. While the primary force in Europeanization undoubtedly emanates from the EU down, the interactive nature of the process means that there is also a 'bottom up' effect. Specific legislative acts, policy initiatives and administrative practices may all originate from 'below' and spread across states and levels of government, but they may nonetheless be described as Europeanization. As a political system, the EU itself has feedback mechanisms, which make it receptive to pressure for change from 'below'. A vast array of actors are presented with opportunities to exercise influence of some sort over the EU. Our definition of Europeanization attempts to capture some of these considerations with its emphasis on the multi-level nature of the EU project.

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