

The Leverhulme Trust: Nations and Regions

Constitutional Change and Identity

**Constitutional Change and Economic
Development**

End of Project Report

Ross Bond, David McCrone and Alice Brown.

Governance of Scotland Forum, The University of
Edinburgh: January 2002.

<u>CONTENTS</u>	Page
Background	3
Objectives	3
Methods	4
Results	5
(Scotland and Wales)	5
(North-East and South-East England)	11
Other Activities	15
Output	16
Impacts	16
Future Research	16

BACKGROUND

The project has been conducted during a period of historic constitutional change in the United Kingdom. It began in the immediate aftermath of the re-establishment of a Parliament in Scotland and Legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland, and the creation of a National Assembly in Wales. The subsequent period has seen the settling in of these new political structures and also the first example of regional devolution in England with the election of the Greater London Authority. The overall research programme is based on a belief that a central motivating factor in this process is **identity**. At the level of the individual, identity is best understood as people's sense of who they are and how they relate to others, and this sense of self and other is reflected in systems of governance. However, it is not only political institutions that embody identity: identity is reflected and mobilized within other institutional arenas, and our project aimed to investigate this process through the study of economic development agencies.

This project has been part of a larger five-year research programme consisting of a further seven studies involving an interdisciplinary team of researchers. The scheduling of our own project during the first two years of the programme has meant that our work has been able both to benefit from interaction with other ongoing projects, and to inform the research process for those with a later starting date. In addition, a parallel research programme, also funded by the Leverhulme Trust and conducted across an identical time frame, is being co-ordinated at University College London, and our work has benefited from areas of interest held in common with a number of studies within this programme.

OBJECTIVES

The initial objectives of the study, as stated in the original research proposal, were as follows:

- 1) To focus on the main (economic) development agencies in Scotland, England and Britain, and, where possible, to contrast Scottish Enterprise (SE) and Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) with each other, as well as their British and English counterparts in order to compare use of national rhetoric, especially in overseas marketing.
 - This objective was achieved in relation to the Scottish and English agencies, but, given the relative paucity of economic agencies operating at a *British* level, none were investigated. However, although Wales is not being studied within any of the other projects in the research programme, it was decided that given the prominent position held by the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) in the institutional fabric of Wales, that the relationship between economic development and national identity in this country should be studied.
- 2) To examine the agencies' documentary outputs.
 - This objective was met in relation to SE, HIE, the WDA, and also two of the English regional development agencies (RDAs). Documentation from relevant *government* sources was also examined.

- 3) To carry out interviews with key decision makers.
 - Representatives from all agencies were interviewed, as were a number of politicians with responsibilities and interests relevant to this area, together with a diverse range of experts such as civil servants, economists, interest group representatives, and the media.
- 4) To investigate the extent to which agencies make direct and indirect use of national identity in their literature, and the form which the representation of national identity takes in this literature.
 - This objective was met, and also extended to include the use of national identity in the more general discourse surrounding economic development, which was assessed through analysis of the interviews conducted.
- 5) To assess whether the establishment of the parliament in Scotland had had any impact upon the use of national vocabulary and rhetoric, and if so, to investigate why this had occurred and what (if any) responses it provoked from English and British agencies.
 - This assessment was undertaken in relation to both Scotland *and* Wales.

METHODS

The conduct of the research is best described as three distinct, yet overlapping, phases: initial background investigation, documentary analysis, and fieldwork. The initial background investigation entailed a literature review drawing on a wide range of academic material, and also a series of informal interviews with academics in Scotland, Wales, and England whose expertise was valuable in shaping some of the early avenues of investigation. Initial documentary analysis was based on publications from the WDA in Wales and SE and HIE in Scotland. A wide variety of material was consulted, such as annual reports, strategy documents, material aimed at overseas investors, and reports oriented to specific areas of performance (for example entrepreneurship). In addition, relevant material produced by the *devolved administrations* in these two countries was also analysed.

A decision was made to study *two* of the English RDAs established in 1999. While we felt that it was important to the project that these bodies be investigated, it was clearly beyond our resources to attempt to study *all* of them. The subsequent selection of the RDAs in the North East (One NorthEast) and South East (South East England Development Agency, or SEEDA) of England was, however, deliberate rather than random. We chose to study the North East because of its proximity to Scotland, the many economic features it shares with both Scotland and Wales, and the comparative strength of its regional identity. The South East was chosen for precisely the opposite reasons: distance from the UK's 'periphery', a quite different economic profile to the other nations and regions being studied, and a weak sense of regional identity. This decision having been made, a similar process of documentary analysis as that conducted in Scotland and Wales was also carried out in relation to the RDAs in these two English regions.

The fieldwork phase of the project took the form of semi-structured interviews with senior economic agency personnel, politicians, and other key informants. Within the agencies themselves, we approached those people whose responsibilities were most likely to make identity a salient issue for them – for example those charged with general strategy or those involved in the *international* operations of these organizations. Politicians and senior civil servants were chosen whose brief included issues related to economic development. Finally, we spoke to other key informants from a variety of backgrounds, who we felt would provide a gauge of the more general discourse of economic development in the various nations and regions and the ways in which identity is a feature of this discourse. The vast majority of those approached responded positively to our request for an interview, and, in all, 38 people were interviewed: 19 in Scotland, 11 in Wales, and 8 in England. These interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and the transcripts analysed in detail.

RESULTS

Project results will be discussed separately under the headings of Scotland and Wales, and the English regions. This reflects the quite different status of these territories and their economic development agencies. Scotland and Wales are *national* territories within the UK state and this has implications both for *identity* and *institutional* structures. Scotland and Wales each have a relatively strong and distinct identity when compared to the English regions; their national economic development agencies have been in existence for some 25 years (a dedicated agency for the Highlands and Islands for 35 years); and they now have devolved political administrations. In contrast, neither of the English regions studied have any sort of claim to ‘national’ status, and this also has implications for identity and institutions: identity is weak compared to Scotland and Wales; regionally-based economic development agencies are newly established; and there has been no formal devolution of any political power to this regional level. While it should therefore be clear that we are comparing quite different territorial entities, there are of course elements of the findings which can be applied more generally, and these will be highlighted where appropriate.

SCOTLAND AND WALES

- **The ‘external’ and ‘internal’ use of national identity:** The use or ‘mobilization’ of national identity by key economic agents such as national development agencies can broadly be categorized as ‘external’ or ‘internal’. ‘External’ mobilization involves the reflection of a general image of a nation (or specific elements of that image) to external audiences, for example overseas investors or consumers. ‘Internal’ mobilization relates to discourse that is largely confined to concerned organizations and individuals *within* the nation, and which centres around the particular characteristics of the nation which are perceived by economic agencies and other key actors as being either problems or advantages. Clearly, although these two categories can be conceptually separated, there is often overlap between them. The distinction between the two will become clearer when specific thematic areas of interest are discussed below (for example, education).

- **Identity resources and national reputation:** The degree to which national identity is mobilized *at all* reflects the extent of the ‘identity resources’ available to key agencies and actors. This is especially true of the external mobilization of identity, because this process is influenced by the strength and nature of what we call national *reputations*, that is, the extent to which nations and their associated qualities (whether ‘real’ or ‘imagined’) are known to those *beyond the nation*, and the precise forms which this knowledge takes (or is perceived to take) – in other words, the dominant imagery associated with a given nation. Such imagery is often rather outdated: in Scotland, what we will call a ‘traditional’ external perspective of national identity, predominantly based on rural and Highland imagery, is dominant, and this is reflected by the differential *mobilization* of national identity according to economic sector. Hence in areas such as tourism, textiles and food and drink, national identity may be seen as highly relevant because the products and services associated with these sectors are highly congruous with traditional perspectives of national identity, but in economic sectors associated with advanced technology, for example, national identity may be relatively unimportant or even irrelevant. While some doubts were raised about the strength of Scotland’s overseas reputation in *absolute* terms, it is also true that *Welsh* national reputation is regarded as weak in *comparison* to Scotland. Further, while rural imagery certainly occupies a significant place in the ‘imagining’ of Wales and its national identity, the *content* of such reputation as Wales does enjoy is also informed to a large extent by *industrial* rather than traditional imagery. Hence the dominant, historically-based perceptions of Welsh identity are likely to be different in character from those that prevail in Scotland, and this has implications for the mobilization of national identity. There is also evidence that the ‘identity resources’ available are more plentiful and stronger in Scotland than in Wales, and therefore that in Wales the mobilization of national identity for economic ends is likely to be more muted and a much more radical process of national reinvention required. This of course reflects other factors that are themselves related to the differential historical development of the two nations, which has resulted in the comparative institutional weakness of Wales and a less obvious separation from its larger English neighbour. In economic terms, this is exemplified by the degree of cross-border integration between the Welsh and English economies, especially with regard to the more highly developed north-east and south-east corners of Wales.
- **The ‘contemporization’ of national economic image:** Notwithstanding the evident influence of history upon national imagery, the principal economic development agencies in both Scotland and Wales, together with other key economic and political agents in these countries, favour the presentation of a *contemporary* image of their respective nations, which is appropriate to the economic context of the 21st century. In doing so, however, these agents must deal with the fact that perceived elements of national identity, from both an external and an internal perspective, might be inappropriate to contemporary economic circumstances. In order to understand how elements of national identity associated with the past are reconciled with the ambition to contemporize identity, we focus on four thematic areas: education, environment, language, and entrepreneurship.
- **Education:** This is especially important in Scotland, where education is a well-established element of Scotland’s distinctive national identity. Particularly within

an external discourse, the quality and traditions of Scottish education are emphasised, and there is an aspiration to construct a *contemporary* Scottish identity based on the nation's *intellectual strengths*. Such a strategy is also in harmony with the current consensus around the need for territories in the more affluent parts of the world to develop 'knowledge-based' economies. A similar discourse is less obvious in Wales, most probably because as a nation it lacks the same extent of educational distinctiveness as Scotland. However, there is some evidence of attempts to present Wales as a place with traditional academic strengths which endure within a contemporary context. It is also noticeable that in *both* nations there is an *alternative* 'internal' discourse that highlights a perceived contemporary *decline* in educational standards.

- **Environment:** In both nations, the quality and attractiveness of the natural environment as a feature of identity and its contribution to contemporary economic aims are emphasised. Environment is believed to be an asset for the encouragement of tourism; in the marketing of certain consumer products (especially in the food and drink sector); in the economic development of the alternative energy sector; and in attracting inward investment and well-qualified, geographically mobile personnel [DO I HIGHLIGHT SCEPTICISM RE. THIS?]. This type of appeal is believed to be especially relevant within a social climate where material gain may, for some at least, be secondary to considerations such as quality of life and environmental protection. The conception of the environment as a contemporary economic asset also provides an example of how a previously *negative* feature of national identity such as 'peripherality' is reinterpreted within a changed economic and social context. In Scotland especially, while the country's geographical position is frequently cited as one of its negative economic attributes, it is commonly argued that technological and economic change reduces the significance of physical location as a disadvantage while at the same time the environmental appeal associated with 'remoteness' becomes an increasingly advantageous feature. This is particularly true of the *Highland and Islands*, and is reflected by the activities and strategies of HIE. However, in both nations there is a considerable degree of scepticism about the degree to which the environment acts as a 'pull' upon investment and personnel, and the extent to which physical location is being neutralized as a disadvantage. We should also note the significance of economic history and dominant external perceptions of national identity to the mobilization of environment as a feature of such identity. The association of Wales' national reputation with its *industrial* past suggests that the promotion of the environment as an economic advantage requires a more thorough process of 'reinvention' than in Scotland, where external perceptions of identity were little affected by the industrial interlude because predominantly rural, Highland-dominated iconography continued to attach itself to the nation.
- **Language:** The existence of a 'minority' language is an especially important feature of identity in Wales, but is also a factor in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. In both these territories, there is a history of Welsh and Gaelic being associated with cultural inferiority and economic backwardness. However, within a contemporary context where the need to establish a sense of competitive distinction is considered important, and where more enlightened attitudes to minority issues prevail, there is substantial evidence to suggest that these minority languages have come to be viewed as economically advantageous. In a *direct*

sense, the perceived elements of this advantage are, first, the general benefits of bilingualism; second, the contribution to economic sectors such as media, cultural industries, publishing, and education; and third, the development of higher value 'cultural tourism'. Language is also thought to have an important *indirect* economic influence in that a strong and respected minority language is believed to contribute to national or regional confidence which in turn leads to improvement in economic performance, perhaps through encouraging greater levels of enterprise or reducing the outmigration of talented and well-qualified individuals. Notwithstanding these positive perspectives, there is also substantial evidence to suggest that key economic agents retain a rather ambivalent attitude to minority languages. While the 'internal' discourse of the WDA, for example, is characterized by a sympathetic, even enthusiastic attitude to the Welsh language, its 'external' stance – for example in material aimed at potential investors – is more likely to downplay the significance of Welsh, and even to emphasise the primacy of English within the economic realm. It is likely that this ambivalence simply reflects broader divisions within Welsh society in debates about the centrality of the language to national identity. While HIE displays a similar *public* commitment to the Gaelic language as a means of improving economic performance, the extent to which the strategies and policies of either agency actually affect patterns of language *use* is also questionable.

- **Entrepreneurship:** The perception of a comparative lack of enterprise or an 'entrepreneurial deficit' is a persistent and consistent feature of economic debate in Scotland and Wales, and one in which elements of national culture or character are routinely implicated. In fact, the association of low levels of enterprise with cultural factors in the two nations is somewhat controversial, and this subject has been extensively researched and written about. Our interest, however, is not related to the 'validity' of such claims, but rather concerned with the means by which national identities are mobilized as part of these debates. The public documents of both Scottish Enterprise and the WDA regularly state the ambition of creating a 'culture of enterprise' in their respective countries, and their concern with this issue is also exemplified by the Scottish agency's launch of a Business Birth Rate Strategy in 1992, and the Welsh agency's publication of an Entrepreneurship Action Plan in 1999. Our findings suggest that there is widespread agreement regarding the comparative lack of entrepreneurship in Scotland and Wales, and that 'cultural' factors are at least partly responsible for the problem. While one argument is that the prestige accorded to the *professions* in Scotland and Wales tends to act as a brake upon entrepreneurship, the most common explanation is that people in both countries are disposed to seek paid employment rather than start their own businesses. This problem is also related to the two nations' economic histories, and the most urbanized and industrialized regions (those that have been dominated by large employers, either industrial, public sector, or inward investors) are perceived as suffering the greatest entrepreneurial deficit. In this respect, they are also similar to a number of the *English* regions. In accordance with such arguments, there is a belief in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland that this region is comparatively self-reliant and enterprising, which runs counter to dominant perceptions of the Highlands as being dependent on subsidy. As well as this apparent variation across *space*, there is also evidence to suggest that the perceived problem of an entrepreneurial deficit is one that has changed across *time*. Hence in Scotland especially, it is the

contemporary national climate specifically that is widely believed to be characterized by an ‘enterprise deficit’, and this climate is often contrasted with the nation’s innovative and entrepreneurial *past*.

- **Reiteration, recapture, reinvention, and repudiation:** The evidence reviewed under the four headings above thus demonstrates how elements of national identity associated with the past may be reconciled with the ambition to contemporize identity. This is done through processes of *reiteration*, *recapture*, *reinvention*, and *repudiation*, which are selectively employed as appropriate to the identity feature in question. *Reiteration* involves the mobilization of a perennially positive element of national identity, for example the ‘external’ use of Scottish education or environment. In the case of *recapture*, there is an ambition to revisit past success in an area of contemporary problems, for example ‘internal’ discussions of Scottish education or entrepreneurship. In the process of *reinterpretation*, historically negative factors are presented as contemporary advantages or as largely neutral. Examples here are the more positive perspectives on the minority languages in Wales and the Highlands and Islands, or the reimagining of the Welsh environment. Another example not examined above is the issue of ‘outmigration’: historically high levels of Scottish emigration can be viewed as a contemporary advantage in that expatriate or ‘Diaspora’ networks are viewed as potential economic assets in relation to tourism, commercial exports, attracting investment for new companies, and in encouraging ‘ancestral’ or ‘ethnic’ Scots with skills or wealth to ‘return’ to Scotland. *Repudiation* entails the omission from contemporary constructions of identity of negative features that are not suitable for reinterpretation, a process appropriate to more negative perspectives of minority languages or those features of the nations’ industrial histories which do not accord well with contemporary economic aspirations.
- **Plurality and uniformity:** Economic agencies, while primarily interested in the construction of a more contemporary national identity, recognise that this will not be *universally* appropriate or applicable. There is a widespread recognition of the *heterogeneity* of national identity and hence the need to adopt, or at least tolerate, *plurality* in the mobilization of this identity. The notion that nations can be ‘branded’ in a uniform manner is therefore very much a minority opinion. In Scotland specifically, the heterogeneous nature of national identity and its presentation for economic purposes is exemplified by the co-existence of traditional and contemporary versions of identity, and also by the clear contrasts between Highlands and Lowlands and the approaches of the development agencies representing these territories. Most notably, HIE has a more explicit *social* remit, is more directly involved in the *cultural* life of its territory, and is also involved in issues surrounding the ownership of land. All these features reflect the distinctive character and identity (or *identities*) of the Highlands and Islands as a region of Scotland.
- **Constitutional change:** At present, there is no strong evidence that devolution has resulted in an increased use of ‘national vocabulary’ amongst economic agencies in Scotland or Wales. However, devolution was viewed by some as having enhanced the ‘Scottishness/Welshness’ of these agencies and other institutions. Another common perception is that devolution as an *event* has raised national profile, and, especially in Wales, may have bolstered national image and

confidence, which then has positive repercussions for economic development. Aside from the issue of identity, devolution was generally held to have had a fairly positive impact in terms of the implementation and co-ordination of policy; in encouraging a more consensual approach; in enhancing the scrutiny and accountability of the economic agencies; and in generating more economic research and statistical analysis aimed specifically at Scotland and Wales. There was, however, a significant amount of more negative comment about the general performance of the devolved administrations, and also concern that the enhanced political influence and scrutiny with regard to the economic agencies could also have a downside in reducing the autonomy and innovation of these organizations. In Wales specifically, there was also some concern about the limitations upon the Assembly's powers. That said, in terms of the *different* constitutional arrangements in Scotland, Wales, and indeed the English regions, *institutional pedigree* in terms of economic development agencies, together with a more general institutional strength, appears, if anything, to be considered more important than any advantages or disadvantages related to the differing devolution settlements. In the Scottish Highlands and Islands, while devolution was generally viewed quite positively, there is also a debate about whether this should mark the beginning of a process that would ultimately see a degree of political autonomy granted to the Highlands itself.

NORTH-EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ENGLAND

- **Regional identity:** Perceptions of identity in the two regions tend to reflect pre-existing assumptions. Regional identity is generally believed to be a strength in the North East, but it is also accepted that this identity lacks the historical basis, clarity of territorial boundaries, and institutional underpinning which exist in Scotland. There was also no great clarity as to how identity in the region might be mobilized for economic purposes, other than in a 'cultural' sense (perhaps related to tourism, or other cultural industries). Further, while there is obviously a sense of a distinct identity, history and culture in the region, this does not necessarily represent an advantage. Similarly to Wales, existing *perceptions* of the region are considered to be relatively weak and too strongly related to the *industrial past*, such that the region has a rather outdated image – hence there is a need for a 'rebranding' to reflect a younger and more culturally-based image. The industrial legacy is also thought to have bequeathed a number of other negative features such as a dominant masculinism, a defensive and introverted attitude, and a lack of dynamism. The one clear positive legacy of this history is a strong sense of cohesion and collectivism in the region. In the South East, there are clear obstacles to a cohesive identity: lack of any historical pedigree; scale and geographical diversity of the region; even the absence of 'regional' media. The exclusion of *London*, which remains an important influence upon the region's identity, is also an issue. While identity is being developed at an *institutional* level by bodies like the Regional Development Agency (SEEDA), the Regional Assembly and the regional Government Office, it is widely accepted that such activities have little impact at a *popular* level.
- **The North East as a 'problem' region:** Overall, the North East tends to be surrounded by quite a 'negative' discourse, with its identity as much tied up with

its status as a ‘problem’ economic region as it is with any cultural, historical, or political sense of identity. Hence RDA material reflects the region’s poor performance in a whole raft of areas related directly or indirectly to the economy: GDP per head, income support claimants, percentage employment of those of working age, hourly earnings, unemployment, limiting long-term illness, business formation and survival rates, educational attainment, environmental dereliction linked to former industrial development, excessive reliance upon externally controlled economic concerns, and the region’s relative distance from principal UK and European markets. Many of these, of course, reflect similarities with Scotland and Wales: peripherality is an issue, although economic and technological change is believed to be mitigating this disadvantage; there are concerns over the outmigration of talent; there is a perceived lack of entrepreneurship, which may have ‘cultural’ origins and is sometimes contrasted with a more enterprising *past*; and although the environmental legacy of industrialization is a problem, the region sees itself as ‘a world leader in the imaginative re-use of [this] historic legacy’. One of the more *positive* perspectives on the region’s identity – the strong cohesion and potential for consensus alluded to above – is also a feature shared with Scotland and Wales. In all three territories there exists what we might call a ‘big village’ myth in which territorial scale and political traditions come together to facilitate collective action amongst powerful actors which is informed by a largely collectivist as opposed to individualist political philosophy. However, there is also a significant body of opinion which questions the validity of this myth and the extent of partnership and consensus in these territories.

- **The South East as a ‘core’ region:** In the South East, identity is most strongly reflected through its ‘core’ status, both in a physical and material sense. Lacking as it is an historical or cultural regionalism, it is in fact the region’s *economic* status as a prosperous, core region which is the most salient marker of regional identity. Crucial here is the way in which the South East relates to ‘the country’ as a whole, in that its prosperity creates a discourse whereby ‘what’s good for the region is good for the country’, which is used by key regional actors in their interaction with central government. There is also some evidence of the region’s ‘neo-liberal’ character being promoted: it is claimed it has the longest average working hours in the UK, the lowest percentage of trade union membership, and a relatively low incidence of working days lost due to industrial disputes. However, while this neo-liberal characterization offers a contrast to the collectivist and consensual images that often attach themselves to the North East (and indeed Scotland and Wales), and the region’s scale and diversity can act as a barrier to cohesion, there is nevertheless a belief that there is a strong capacity for partnership and consensus in the region, and there is also evidence to suggest a more active involvement in partnership with *other regions* than exists elsewhere.
- **Alternative discourses:** Our work in Scotland and Wales showed that there is not always consistency in the manner in which identity is perceived and externally portrayed. The tension between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ accounts of education in Scotland, for example, is repeated in the North East of England, where widespread concern with skills and educational standards co-exists with an external presentation of these features as regional *assets*. Similarly, alongside the South East’s depiction as a core region, there is an alternative discourse, in which it is

portrayed as a region with *problems*. This discourse has three key elements: the existence of sub-regional pockets of poverty; what is perceived as the comparatively poor performance of the region in an *international* sense; and the problems that are a *by-product of success*, such as congestion, transport, and environmental degradation. This tension between growth and sustainability represents a prominent dilemma for the region. Hence the key regional institutions must seek to resolve this tension, for example by placing a strong emphasis upon ‘smarter’ or ‘spaceless’ growth, which fits well with the region’s attributes of high qualifications and a concentration of ‘knowledge-intensive’ activity.

- **Constitutional change:** One of the most interesting features of the new RDAs relates to their position within the changing constitutional landscape of the UK. With the exception of Greater London, the English regions have thus far not been part of the process of political decentralisation initiated by the Blair government. However, many see the establishment of RDAs as representing an important first step toward more formal political devolution to the English regions. Amongst respondents, there was a mixture of opinion as to whether the establishment of RDAs *in itself* represented a measure of devolution. While some were quite unequivocal in rejecting this suggestion, emphasising the continuing centralized nature of the system, others were more supportive of the notion that the RDAs represented some form of devolution, albeit one that was not *democratically* sanctioned. In the South East, this issue is further complicated by the RDA’s establishment within a political context that remains essentially opposed to regionalization, given the Conservatives’ electoral dominance of the region. What is apparent is that the likely contribution of the RDAs (along with other relatively recent initiatives like the Government Offices for the Regions) to creating a more ‘settled’ series of regional boundaries in England may prove a significant factor in any future strengthening of English regionalism. An important dimension of this is that they contribute, both through their own existence and their role as a catalyst for more effective partnerships at a regional level, to a strengthening of the *institutional* base in the English regions, which is particularly important in regions like the South East.
- **Similarities in regional agendas:** The RDAs’ agendas exhibit a high degree of commonality, especially in the preoccupation with issues such as social inclusion, sustainable development, the promotion of enterprise, the perceived need to more closely involve higher education institutions in the process of economic development, and the emphasis on the quality of the local environment both as an attraction to personnel or investors and in terms of environment-related economic activity. While these similarities partly reflect the political influence of central government upon the RDAs, it is also true that many of the most prominent preoccupations of their strategies are similar to those of the (more autonomous) Scottish and Welsh agencies. Indeed, even in Scotland and Wales, we should not overestimate the extent to which distinctiveness is sought or achieved through the mobilization of national identity. Similarities are common due to the fact that nations and regions in the UK are faced with broadly similar economic challenges and problems, and also because of the more general influence of hegemonic economic and political ideas. That said, it is interesting that economic agencies often present problems and advantages as if they *were* quite particular to their regions, and thus in reflecting ubiquitous concerns they may still do so through a

regional or national 'lens'. Hence it may well be that distinctiveness is 'constructed' using the 'raw material' of identity that nations and regions perceive to be available. Thus nations and regions often emphasise the particular qualities of their educational infrastructure or natural environment, for example. In addition, as our work in Scotland and Wales demonstrates, factors such as reputational and institutional strength determine the extent to which identity can and will be mobilized.

- **Identity and economic development – concluding points:** The economic mobilization of identity based upon historical, cultural or institutional features is not a prominent feature of the two English regions studied. The South East in particular lacks any such 'raw material' and so there is no attempt to mobilize identity in this way, but nor is there much evidence in the North East of the region's comparatively strong identity being used as a promotional device. To the extent that the English agencies do reflect the identity of their regions, they do so through reflecting their 'core' and 'problem' status. The North East could thus be said to be doubly disadvantaged, in that it enjoys neither the national resources of Scotland and Wales, nor the 'core' advantages of the South East. All nations and regions attempt to highlight their distinctiveness, to construct a sense of competitive advantage using the 'raw material' to hand, which can take the form of perceived elements of historical-cultural identity, or the predominant characteristics of the region in more general terms. However, this raw material is commonly used to construct competitive advantage in very similar areas, such as education and research, environmental quality, or other commonly cited 'clusters' of economic activity. Most regions also tend to display contrasts between the presentation of advantage in such areas to an *external* audience, and *internally* expressed fears about economic weakness. Hence a dilemma in attempting to relate national/regional identity to economic development is that agencies established in order to reflect *diversity* in fact often exhibit extensive *similarities*.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The research has benefited considerably from two events in particular: a meeting with the research programme Advisory Group in June 2001 and a colloquium with the research team based at University College London, held in Edinburgh in September 2001. Regular interaction and meetings with our fellow researchers on the Edinburgh team has also proved invaluable, thus demonstrating the benefit of the interdisciplinary and multi-project nature of the research programme.

OUTPUT

We are about to submit/have submitted a paper for publication to the journal *Nations and Nationalism*. This has enabled us to draw together many of the project's most salient and interesting findings, while at the same time building on and further developing our wider research interests in the area of nationalism and national

identity. This paper is specifically related to Scotland and Wales, and we therefore plan to publish at least one other paper, which will have a greater focus on the English regions while still using Scotland and Wales as important comparisons.

IMPACTS

Although the research was not specifically oriented towards evaluation or policy, a summary of the findings have/will be sent to all of our interview participants, most of whom occupy prominent positions within political or economic development networks. Hence there is the potential for our findings to have an impact upon future strategy and policy.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Given that there was little evidence to suggest any major impact upon the mobilization of national identity as a result of the devolution settlements in Scotland and Wales, it would be potentially valuable to monitor this issue as the new constitutional structures become more well-established. In England, there is a potentially huge task to be done in monitoring the growth and development of *regional* identity within the changing constitutional context, especially in relation to any future demands for greater regional *political autonomy*. Clearly, the RDAs, as a key part of the nascent institutional structure in the English regions, will continue to have a significant role in any such developments.