

REVIEW: EDINBURGH AND GLASGOW: CONTRASTS IN COMPETITIVENESS AND COHESION

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N. Bailey, I. Turok and I. Docherty (1999), **Edinburgh and Glasgow: Contrasts in competitiveness and cohesion**, University of Glasgow, Department of Urban Studies, November 1999, Pbk £10.00, ISBN 1 871769 58 0

There is considerable interest in what is described as the regional economic paradigm which questions the nation state as the most appropriate basis for economic policy design and implementation (Barnes and Ledebur 1998). Nation states are viewed as artificial constructs and more functional economic regions are advocated as the more effective basis for policy. In particular, the potential of the older, established concept of city regions has attracted considerable attention as the more appropriate locus for interacting labour, capital and housing markets. This interest is generally mirrored in the contemporary political agendas of devolution and processes of decentralised governance and public administration. Care has to be taken, however, in moving down this particular road as any such interest tends to mask the inherited baggage of different localities. Devolution and indeed decentralised administration arrangements do not fall on clean slates. They impact on differentials in relative economic structures and performance, the policies and programmes already in place and the institutional capacity across the old devolved nation state and within the new political entities. There is also the dynamic of political expectations. The contemporary differential nature of devolution in the United Kingdom gives a flavour of this unevenness in the economic and institutional landscape (Bogdanor 1999).

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The report under review provides such a glimpse into the complex reality of addressing the dynamics of such devolved economies and city regions. The economic inter-relations of Edinburgh and Glasgow were well established but the new devolved agenda throws them into much sharper relief. The report is part of a national research programme of the Economic and Social Research Council to improve understanding of the nature and consequences of urban change. The programme aims to assess the changing basis of relative urban economic performance, to assess the effects of social conditions on economic development and to help improve the effectiveness of urban strategies. The report is an interim publication of the Central Scotland Integrative Case Study within the broader ESRC research programme and sets out a review of the contemporary economic and social conditions in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Particular attention is paid to the processes of competitiveness and cohesion in the relative performance of the two cities.

The report documents considerable statistical information relating to the economic conditions, demography, income and wealth, housing, education and health. It also considers the principal issues in the changing governance arrangements and institutional capacity of the two cities. The report suggests six themes as important outcomes at this stage of the research.

Firstly, that there is a striking contrast between the two cities reflecting their economic history and the ongoing processes of change. Whilst Edinburgh is experiencing relative economic growth, Glasgow is undergoing long-established endemic decline with unemployment and derelict land as its two principal issues. There are important caveats in this context. Edinburgh, for example, has not experienced as rapid economic growth as other smaller town and cities whilst the rate of decline in Glasgow is slowing.

Secondly, the reality is more complex than a simple east-west contrast would suggest. Both cities comprise parallel processes of decline and growth in their city centres and in their wider city regions. This is particularly the case in Glasgow, with considerable differences in economic performance across industrial sectors, occupational groups and specific areas.

Thirdly, reflecting the underlying economic conditions, the social effects of the economic restructuring have been very uneven in both cities. Both have experienced decentralisation of people. There are marked differences in income and wealth across the cities. In Glasgow, the report points to the contrast between the commuter suburbs and the inner city and peripheral housing estates. The social processes are themselves highly complex and in

the case of Glasgow have led to a more polarised map of urban society. This is accentuated with the contrast in housing, with Glasgow still living with relatively poor housing conditions, whilst Edinburgh is grappling with issues associated with a buoyant housing market. Furthermore, the report argues that a socially segregated city which is divided by arbitrary administrative boundaries is difficult and costly to manage.

Fourthly, the fragmentation of local governance has emphasised the local but this leads to difficulties in policy coherence and consistency across city regions. This is a major challenge to the strategic capacity of the institutions involved. Fifthly, the report notes that the policy agendas for east and west are different. In Edinburgh, it is about managing economic growth in a sustainable manner whereas in Glasgow it is about achieving growth, targeting core areas and matching growth to local need.

The report confirms much of what was known and which has been documented over the years by policy makers, local authorities and academics. Its value, however, is that it brings together the evidence in a structured way. By examining the specific themes of competitiveness and cohesion, the contrasts between Edinburgh and Glasgow are stark. Although the report sets out to provide an interim statement of the conditions in the two cities there is a tendency to move to policy prescription. This is premature as yet. More insights are needed in terms of the inter-linkages between Edinburgh and Glasgow and the ways in which these can influence the central belt as a whole.

The report asserts that the Scottish Parliament has an important role to play in promoting the common interests of Scottish cities and the central belt 'as a whole by helping to establish the strategic perspective within which social needs, economic opportunities and environmental problems can be considered together and addressed effectively'. This advocates the design of a spatial framework within which political commitments to social and economic inclusion can be put into effect. This is the core of the issue. Important questions remain for Scotland as a whole. Given the importance of both cities to the Scottish economy in terms of economy, image and innovation why, for example, was Edinburgh underperforming prior to its recent boom? Is the relative concentration of economic activity in the city sustainable in the longer term? Is there not a case for the dispersal of economic activity and investment into wider Scottish geography to relieve these pressures? There must be a concern that in the context of devolution, the dynamics of the national economy might replicate the broader geographical divisions in the UK economy. Where, for example, is

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Scotland's Watford Gap? There are concerns also about the impact of the uncertainties associated with the Glasgow economy on the wider central belt and Scottish economies. The report documenting the next stage in the research is eagerly awaited.

REFERENCES

Barnes WR and Ledebur LC (1998) **The New Regional Economies. The US Common Market and the Global Economy.** London, Sage.

Bogdanor V (1999) **Devolution in the United Kingdom.** Oxford, Oxford University Press.

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