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# The Social Relations of Organisational Activity and the New Local Governance in the UK

Mike Raco

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**Summary.** The nature and form of local governance in the UK became the focus for a wide range of academic and policy debates during the 1980s and 1990s. The growth of non-elected localist agencies working alongside local authorities had a major influence on the effectiveness of, and the local policy-making processes behind, policy areas such as urban regeneration. This paper contributes to these debates by arguing that one often neglected or underemphasised aspect of our understanding of local governance is that of the social relations of organisational activity. Drawing on organisational theories and linking them to contemporary debates on local governance, the paper suggests that an exploration of the internal dynamics of non-elected institutions, working in and through wider social, economic and political contexts, provides a more sophisticated understanding of contemporary local political processes than studies which focus on the powers, resources and responsibilities of organisations *per se*. The study suggests that, in the context of partnership-building and institutional co-operation at the local level, the types of organisational dynamics highlighted in the paper may take on even greater significance in future.

## Introduction

It is widely argued that new forms of local governance in the UK are characterised by exclusionary processes of institutionalisation, the heightened centralisation of power and the marginalisation of local communities in policy-making processes (see Keating, 1993; Peck and Tickell, 1995; Lovering, 1995; Jones, 1999). In particular, new institutional forms have emerged, with greater emphases being given to the economic competitiveness of places and governance structures which facilitate new forms of development. Quasi-autonomous spatially focused bodies have been established to pursue particular agen-

das, often set by central state, with limited recourse to local socioeconomic relations or recipient communities. These policy areas include education and training, health care and physical development policy. Research on quangos, such as Urban Development Corporations and Training and Enterprise Councils often characterised them as top-down organisations, shielded from scrutiny by their non-local chains of accountability and acting in a determined, non-negotiable manner (see Weir and Hall, 1994). The emphasis of policy has shifted to a post-bureaucratic agenda with local governance

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being characterised in terms of flexibility and dynamism with a limited role for local social, economic and political relations and communities.

However, a range of recent research has sought to address the issue of how these new institutional arrangements operate in practice. Imrie and Thomas (1999), for example, have demonstrated the ways in which Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), one of the best examples of the broader institutional changes in local governance, became embedded in their socio-political and economic contexts as a necessary rather than contingent requirement for them to undertake particular strategies. Those that were most successful were those which were able to establish effective local relations with existing institutions, communities and other relevant organisations, thereby promoting forms of locally sensitive, rather than externally defined, development. In effect, studies of how quangos operate in practice need to be sensitive to organisational dynamics—an aspect of the local governance debate that is often underemphasised in the existing literature.

This paper examines the ways in which organisational practices impact upon forms and patterns of policy implementation. It argues that organisational theory can be used to develop a broader understanding of processes of institutionalisation within local governance, spatial variations in policy delivery and the opportunities and threats posed to local communities by emerging local policy-making processes. Whilst such perspectives have been criticised for their partial focus on the internal dynamics of organisations (see Lovering, 1999), this paper suggests that, if conceptualised as complementary to an exploration of wider socio-political dynamics, a more sophisticated understanding of contemporary local political processes can be developed. With a growing emphasis in urban policy on partnership formation, the mechanisms in and through which organisations interact are increasingly critical to the wider effectiveness of policy (see Jessop, 1998). Drawing on evidence from a research project

which examined the politics of local economic development in two British cities, Cardiff and Sheffield, the paper highlights the ways in which UDCs operated as organisations in their local contexts and the socio-political tensions within them. It identifies the ways in which these impacted on local networks and the influence that they had on the policy agendas of local economic development that were developed.

The study begins by examining the nature of organisations as entities and discusses the extent to which internal organisational dynamics influence their modes of operation on the ground. A second section then turns to the implications of these themes for contemporary research on the new urban governance, focusing, in particular, on UDCs and their influence on local decision-making processes and the politics of local economic development. The paper then assesses the politics of local economic development in Cardiff and Sheffield, through a discussion of the dynamics operating within institutions, the importance of intersubjective relations in the construction of working relationships between institutions and the development of community involvement in local decision-making processes.

### **Organisations, Bureaucracies and the Implementation of Policy Programmes**

Organisational theories examine the mechanisms through which organisations are established and developed. They explore how organisations interact with their wider socio-political environments, the processes through which they establish and modify strategic and operational decisions and the factors influencing the implementation of policy (see Bunning, 1992; Johnson and Scholes, 1997; Lindblom, 1959; Smith, 1994). Traditionally, organisational studies focused on bureaucratic institutions which possessed: formal rules and procedures of institutional action; specialised divisions of labour; hierarchies of authority and management; and a body of appropriately qualified, full-time permanent officials (see Weber, 1968). Bureaucracies

are structured to be rationalistic in their decision-making processes and policy programmes are developed and implemented in a neutral and impartial manner. As Young (1990) notes, these 'views from nowhere' are portrayed as detached from subjects, objective and dispassionate. In essence, the positionality and reflexivity of bureaucratic agents is played down with rules, procedures and norms representing claims to proper legitimacy, impartiality and justice in decision-making processes.

In this paper, it is argued that contemporary research on local governance in the UK still implicitly and explicitly imbues some of these assumptions. Organisations are often treated in *a priori* terms so that in urban policy, for example, institutional studies focus on the powers, resources and political contexts within which organisations have been established and downplay the (necessary rather than contingent) impacts of contexts of action and processes of policy delivery and implementation. All organisational actions are imbued with discourses, assumptions and ideological/political agendas many of which will reflect the interests of dominant or hegemonic socio-political interests (Young, 1990; Argenti, 1993). Thus, organisations are politically constructed and their objectives and structures will be a consequence of some form of contestation and subject to challenge and modification. This establishes the possibilities for organisational action to be modified, adapted and influenced by the social agents operating in particular contexts, thereby creating differences in institutional policy-making and implementation across space and time (see Massey, 1995; Giddens, 1985). Rules and procedures cannot exist independently of actors for, as King (1999, p. 217) notes, "the social context can only be other people, at other times and places". Social relations are, therefore, always articulated in the development, organisation and evolution of institutions.

A focus on the social relations of organisational activity requires an examination of the dynamic processes in and through which pol-

icy programmes are developed, implemented and perceived. Social structures, and their institutional forms (such as bureaucratic organisations), cannot be said to exist in an *a priori*, autonomous or metaphysical sense. For example, the constraints and opportunities faced by actors working in organisations are, in effect, conditioned by the actions of other actors (see Giddens, 1995; Massey, 1994; Beck, 1998). Consequently,

nothing meaningful can be said about individual practices or understanding independently of the social and historical contexts in which those individuals are situated (King, 1999, p. 219).

Moreover, King suggests (p. 219) that, as a consequence of this, "it is not true that these conditions are independent of everybody and that everybody can do nothing". Research needs to establish the ways in which actors constrain one another and the relationships of power both between them and constituted by them (see Campbell, 1999).

The biographies, experiences and aptitudes of individual officers and policy-makers may, therefore, be central to the ways in which relationships are constructed in local areas. To work with assumptions, that are sometimes implied in the literature on, for example, quasi-autonomous urban regeneration agencies, that they can be understood primarily in terms of their official rules, norms and resources, understates the extent to which actors at all levels of organisations construct and reproduce their activities (see Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Hjern and Porter, 1981). In Beck's terms,

it is no longer possible to conceive of institutions independently of its actors. Conflict over institutional policies break out within the institutions (Beck, 1998, p. 21).

In some organisational contexts, individuals may draw on particular strategies to develop relations with clients or other organisations which may run counter to aspects of organisational strategy and which may influence policy programmes in a number of ways.

Many of these processes are exemplified in Lipsky's (1980) study of state housing policy implementation in the US in which two forms of influence are identified. First, actors may be able to exercise discretion over the nature, quality and degree of benefits or sanctions provided by their agencies. Discretion operates through parameters which give shape to policy choices and the extent to which discretion takes place as expected is critically dependent on a number of factors such as the variable capability and knowledge of individuals to take action, a lack of awareness of formal rules or lack of up-to-date knowledge or wider social prejudices, (mis)conceptions and positionalities. Moreover, the rules and procedures through which individuals operationalise institutional policy programmes are themselves subject to misunderstanding, complexity and contradiction. Programmes in a number of policy areas often rely on the decisions made by local agents on the ground who attempt to synthesise a variety of complex and differentially targeted programmes.

Lipsky also suggests that individuals possess a degree of autonomy in their activities and that "most analysts take for granted that the work of lower level participants will more or less conform to what is expected of them" (p. 16). Yet, actors possess the capacity to obstruct, challenge and influence the agendas in which they operate. Some may not, for instance, share the objectives or aspirations of the organisations for which they are agents. Different members of the same organisation may be in conflict with intersubjective boundaries being drawn in a variety of ways. The effective management of highly professionalised or unionised employees critically depends on the nature of such relations and these will have more than a contingent effect on the operationalisation of policy. Others, in less powerful positions, may also be able to develop effective challenges to the operation of institutions by withdrawing their labour in particular ways (see Pringle, 1989; Halford, 1994; Edwards, 1994).<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on organisational theories in this

way has implications for research on the new local governance. Much of the neo-liberal challenge to local government in the 1980s and 1990s was premised on an ideological dualism between a bureaucratic, rationalistic public sector and a dynamic, entrepreneurial set of post-bureaucratic new institutions (see Imrie and Raco, 1999).<sup>2</sup> The new local governance has been characterised by the emergence of new quango institutions, established by central state, to oversee a number of areas of local state policy. These bodies have been widely criticised for: their lack of local embeddedness; a tendency to implement policies in places, rather than for places; weak lines of accountability constructed through markets, rather than formal political procedures; and the aggressive implementation of policy (see Cochrane, 1993; Keating, 1993). However, there have been relatively few studies of how such organisations work *in situ*, and the key role that organisational dynamics and local actors, working in and through often complex rules and procedures, have in shaping the ways in which policy programmes are implemented and delivered.

Moreover, recent changes in the institutional structures of policy-making and delivery have increasingly depended on the activities of institutions on the ground. The policy emphasis has shifted from a focus on the practices of local authorities to a range of new institutional players, drawn from public, private and voluntary sectors working through institutional partnerships (see Healey, 1997). The emphasis has shifted towards the development of relations between institutions, policy stakeholders and communities and these are critically dependent on the construction of effective intersubjective and interorganisational relationships. The nature of this interaction has, in one sense, become even more important to the forms of local governance that have developed in different places than in the past. These processes are exemplified by the activities of a number of institutions and regeneration agencies in the politics of local economic development in the UK. The following section examines these themes in re-

gard to one of the most powerful institutional embodiments of the changing nature of local governance—the Urban Development Corporations and the policy-making processes in which they have operated and played a key role in shaping.

### **Urban Development Corporations and Local Policy-making Processes**

Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) were designed to by-pass existing local decision-making processes and develop new strategies to tackle socioeconomic decline in deprived spaces.<sup>3</sup> Their principal aim was recapitalise inner-city areas, encouraging private-sector investment through subsidy, land preparation and simplified planning processes. Private-sector ways of working were encouraged and UDCs were to provide a platform for private-sector individuals to bring their own styles and ways of working to public-sector policy programmes (Imrie and Raco, 1999). The will-power, charisma and dynamism of private individuals were placed in juxtaposition to the bureaucratic, formulaic, inflexible characterisation of local government officials and planners. This was particularly the case in regard to inner-city areas which were commonly governed by left-of-centre, Labourist local administrators (Imrie and Thomas, 1993; Tiechlar and Watts, 2000).

A variety of research has demonstrated the variations in the activities of UDCs in different places. Their time-limited existence was designed to encourage a dynamism and a private-sector-like drive towards achieving results in a short time-frame. However, the recession of the early 1990s triggered a collapse in property markets and undermined their major, anticipated sources of income. UDCs also found that, in order to fulfil their objectives, they needed to develop a number of links with local organisations and communities to overcome local barriers to development. As Imrie and Thomas note, some degree of

able and necessary condition for the successful formulation and implementation of UDC policy (Imrie and Thomas, 1999, p. 5).

Moreover, many of the early criticisms of the detached and closed nature of UDC decision-making processes had some influence on the nature of UDC relations with community groups. In some places, UDCs actively sought to develop, albeit circumscribed, community relations to deflect adverse publicity and foster local legitimacy for their actions. Imrie and Thomas suggest that,

a full understanding of UDCs needs to recognise their involvement in the webs of interactions and collaboration with local participants in the development process, processes which are integral to the shaping, containment, and development of UDC strategy and policy (Imrie and Thomas, 1993, p. 21).

For a number of UDCs, research suggests that a critical dimension in their degree of embeddedness into local socioeconomic relations were the working relationships cultivated between officers on the ground and local agents. These relations worked on two levels—relations between UDCs and state institutions with a stake in the local politics of regeneration and relations with local community organisations, both as recipients of UDC policy and as active contributors to strategy-making.

Given the critical importance of these dimensions, an organisational focus can help to provide a wider understanding of the reasons behind variations in policy implementation in different places. Robinson and Shaw's (1999) study of the interactions between key individuals in the Teesside Development Corporation and local authorities, for example, highlights the influence of the intersubjective and interorganisational dynamics which have been involved in the development of working relations in the area. Their research documents the steady deterioration in these relations and indicates that one of the primary reasons for this change was the

local embeddedness ... was both unavoid-

particular impact of the Chief Executive and Chair in shaping the TDC's approach to local regeneration. The local politics of economic development were characterised by conflictual relationships in which there was "little evidence that the UDC went in anyway native, meshed with local interests or embedded itself in local social and political relations" (Imrie and Thomas, 1993, p. 21).

One of the central reasons put forward for these findings was the impact of senior individuals in TDC in defining the organisation's style and its relations with existing local political structures. As the authors suggest, many of these changes were due to

the particular impact of a powerful quango, dominated by a Chief Executive and Chair with particular views about regeneration, in an area traditionally accustomed to the exercise of corporate power and characterised by an often weak and fragmented political system (Robinson and Shaw, 1999, p. 165).

In its Chair, Sir Ron Norman (a successful property developer) and, in particular, in its Chief Executive, Duncan Hall (formerly in charge of Corby District Council), TDC possessed key individuals who asserted a particular vision of how TDC should act and develop its regeneration programmes. The former served as the public face of the organisation whilst the latter played a key role in developing strategy. Indeed, the authors suggest that Hall "largely determined the approach" of TDC and "provided leadership within the organisation" (p. 165). Consequently, these actors were the central players in defining TDC's style.

Moreover, their biographical experiences were essential in explaining their particular positions with regard to the regeneration strategies. Hutton (1995, p. 38) has argued that, in relation to new quango institutions, "the Chief Executives and Chairmen of these bodies are nearly all Conservative, with their non-political business members tending to be Conservative, as well". In regard to TDC, Coulson (1989; quoted in Robinson and Shaw, 1999, p. 165) found that

The Chair has a property background and has interpreted his role as getting physical development, bricks and mortar on the ground, as quickly as possible. Its Chief Executive was previously in charge of Corby District Council, has little faith in traditional town planning, gives little weight to consultation and involvement of local people, and believes that in most traditional local authority economic development activity the fundamental requirements of economic rejuvenation, namely political certainty and decisive decision-making, to match the requirements of incoming industry, are irrevocably lost.

The assertive style adopted by TDC, and the rejection of traditional ways of working, helped to ensure that TDC appeared to many as an autocratic, top-down organisation. A local MP, for example, commented that "it is a well known fact of life in Teesside that the TDC and particularly the corporation's Chief Executive, are difficult to deal with" (quoted in Robinson and Shaw, 1999, p. 165).

What this example demonstrates is the key role that organisational practices and actors, working in particular socio-political contexts, can exert on the political processes of local governance. The particular configuration of organisational power and the mechanisms through which they are asserted are not simply contingent factors in the ways in which institutions operate, but are a necessary part of any study of local decision-making processes. Similar findings have emerged in Merseyside (where the Chair of the Development Corporation was popularly perceived as being a 'fat cat', intent on promoting his own position), Sheffield and Tyne and Wear (see Meegan, 1999; Dabinett and Ramsden, 1993; Byrne, 1993; Colenutt, 1993). In understanding the forms of embeddedness that quango institutions, such as UDCs, develop in local areas, the nature of these relations is, therefore, of critical importance. Organisational structures can be changed in an attempt to facilitate new forms of interaction with communities. Some UDCs, for example, recognised the importance of such relations with

regard to community liaison. Officers were appointed with the specific objective of developing links between local communities and UDC policy-making processes. Particular organisational forms adopted by communities in some places also fostered closer or conflictual relations with UDCs and helped to shape the processes and forms of interaction in particular ways (see Raco, 2000).

The paper now turns to an empirical study of two recently wound-up UDCs, the Sheffield Development Corporation (SDC) and Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC) and examines the role that such dynamics had in both cities on the nature and form of UDC activities and their relations with local institutions and community groups. The research was carried out between Spring 1996 and Autumn 1998 and involved the collection of a variety of relevant documentary resources and 93 interviews with a range of local actors from institutions and community groups in order to assess the politics of local economic development in the two cities. It suggests that such actors played a key role in establishing practical types of institutional interaction and that internal differences within the UDCs had an impact on specific policy measures and the ways in which they were implemented. Moreover, the relations developed with community groups were also indicative of the role of key actors and their contacts with particular communities and community representatives and this is examined through an examination of community-UDC relations.

### **Policy-making Processes and Institutional Relations: Shaping Policies in Local Contexts**

In both cities, UDCs emerged as part of a wider set of changes in the institutional structures of local governance. Established in the late 1980s and existing through the 1990s, the UDCs were charged with the economic revitalisation of particular locales within Cardiff<sup>4</sup> and Sheffield.<sup>5</sup> They were part of a wider attempt by central government to by-

pass local government through the direct appointment of single-task, dedicated agencies, accountable primarily to their paymasters, central government. However, they increasingly engaged in sets of relationships with other partner agencies in order to facilitate their regeneration programmes. This trend towards partnership working was evident in both cities, although to different degrees and for different purposes (see Raco, 1998). This section assesses the role of dynamics within the context of these institutional relations. It demonstrates that organisations and actors, working in and through their local institutional structures of power, played an integral part in shaping the particular configurations that such relations took.

A key aspect of organisational practice is the role of leading actors in shaping strategies and wider institutional relations (see Smith, 1994). As in other studies of UDCs, the Chairs and Chief Executives played a pivotal role in defining the organisations' working relationships with other institutions. In both cities, the Chairs were appointed by central government ministers to act as 'strong' leaders, shaping and defining their organisations in their own image. Both had had experience of working with property development and were regarded as 'local' choices. Geoffrey Inkin, Chair of CBDC, had previously chaired the Welsh property development quango, the Land Authority for Wales, which acquired sites and sold them off for development. He was also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Welsh Fusiliers and his appointment ostensibly represented an attempt to 'Welshify' the CBDC, due to his long career background in the city. Hugh Sykes, in Sheffield, was a self-made property developer who began his career in the city. He was originally appointed to represent a public, local face for the organisation. His business background as a self-made millionaire (through property developments and asset accumulation) also represented what Peck (1995) has identified as a maverick type entrepreneur in line with wider, central state, political ideologies.

Both Chairs played a central role as the

public representatives of their organisations. They also possessed responsibility for selecting their Boards, developing higher-level links with other organisations and initiating policy programmes in line with their UDCs' objectives. Evidence from both cities suggests that they were proactive and highly skilled in developing contacts with other organisations. They established bilateral relations with local authorities and other development agencies and were particularly effective in promoting their organisations' regeneration agendas, which played a key role in shaping local attitudes and perceptions towards the UDCs. In contrast to the approach of the Merseyside and Teesside Development Corporations, discussed earlier, the Chairs in Cardiff and Sheffield were keen to engage with existing local authorities. Both were involved in establishing partnerships and formal agreements with other players and both were held in high regard by chief local authority actors. A senior councillor in Cardiff Bay, for example, suggested that

Despite my initial reservations, the selection of Inkin was a major step in the regeneration. He has been crucial dynamo in the regeneration—he's good at making things happen and he has been effective in keeping a tight lid on opposition to the development round here.

Similarly a former head of SCC claimed that

It was quickly apparent that if you wanted to work with SDC you had to do it through Sykes. He was what I would call a 'strong' leader, somebody who was in touch with whole vision thing of SDC but at the same time had a good grasp of the details of what was going on.

Such views were representative of a wide range of players in the regeneration areas of both cities. In some instances, the Chair was seen as an embodiment of the whole UDC and its proposals. Their particular styles, ways of interacting and general approach to developing relations can be seen as a vital part in the processes of embeddedness taking

place. For example, local media organisations tended to 'personalise' their coverage of the UDCs by focusing and relying in the main part on the Chairs as the Corporations' public faces (see Thomas, 1995; *South Wales Echo*, 1997; *Sheffield Telegraph*, 1990a; 1990b).

The role of the Chief Executives was also critical to the perceptions of the UDCs and the ways in which they developed and implemented programmes. Mike Boyce, Chief Executive of CBDC, was formerly Chief Executive of South Glamorgan County Council. Consequently, he brought with him a range of existing contacts and relations with institutions and community groups. Boyce was one of the key players in developing local partnership relations and only took up his position in 1991 following the departure of his predecessor. According to some local authority representatives, his arrival heralded a change in emphasis on the part of CBDC's relations. It was suggested that CBDC had become much more focused on developing co-operative, partnership relations, following his appointment and in some instances existing personal relations also played a key part. Similarly in Sheffield, the Chief Executive, Graham Kendall, played a central role in most of SDC's activities. In their position as chief professional officers, their roles gave them significant power to shape 'everyday' decisions and longer-term strategic objectives. Particular forms of community relations, for example, were developed in both cities by the Chief Executive in ways which matched their particular perspectives on what could and should be achieved.

Both UDCs also saw the co-option of key local actors as a central part of their political strategies. In Sheffield, two prominent local businessmen, Norman Adsetts and Richard Field, were taken on by SDC, the former becoming Vice-Chair. These individuals had both established their own personal networks in the city through years of managing and developing their own businesses and playing active roles in local business associations. In Cardiff, Alex Cox, Chair of a major manufacturing company was also co-opted onto

CBDC's executive to help facilitate local contacts with existing firms and provides a public symbol of the local embeddedness of the UDC. The promotion of such actors represented a conscious strategy to access existing social, political and economic networks. Both UDCs had experienced some degree of local political hostility from existing institutions and communities (see Imrie and Thomas, 1995; Dabinett and Ramsden, 1993). Being able to demonstrate that particular, well-known individuals were part of their executive structures was one way of nullifying such opposition. It also played a practical role. Adsetts, for example, noted in interview that

When SDC came here there were a lot of wagons being put in circles ... It was up to people like me to say, look, this organisation is not a threat but an opportunity for the city. I knew people in the business community and the council, many of them were my friends, and I decided to try and knock heads together to get people working together.

These views were corroborated by councillors involved in the establishment of partnerships. As a former SCC leader commented in interview

There was no doubt that having people like Norman [Adsetts] on the SDC made a difference to the way we saw the organisations. I'd known him for years and he persuaded me to go onto SDC's Board myself to try to ensure that I, as Leader of the Council, had some influence over what the organisation was doing.

Key individuals, therefore, played a significant role in helping to establish SDC's political legitimacy and to develop its local networks of influence. Whilst their incorporation represented a form of institutionalisation, their presence and their reflexive use of previous networks and relations had an influence on the ways in which policy relations developed. Once again, a fuller explanation of the particular forms that local organisational relations have taken requires

an exploration of how such dynamics are established and reproduced.

This was particularly apparent in the development of partnership relations in the city in which intersubjective, personal relations established between key individuals helped to establish particular types of institutional co-operation and/or conflict. During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, there was a marked shift in Sheffield City Council's approach to the SDC. Whereas during the 1980s SCC had been a vociferous advocate of municipal socialist local policies and a critic of SDC, by the early 1990s it began to change its approach. A new, moderate and pragmatic leadership emerged which sought proactive engagement with SDC and the development of partnership forms of working. In June 1988, the leaders of SDC and SCC signed a formal agreement whereby the two would

act as partners in promoting their agreed objectives to increase economic activity and reduce unemployment in the interests of and to the benefit of all of the people of Sheffield ... [with SDC] operating in the interests of the long term economic regeneration of Sheffield and within the spirit of partnership which has been established (Wills, 1989, p. 22).

This agreement required the Chair of SDC to meet senior councillors on a regular basis to discuss the regeneration and promised closer liaison between officers.

According to one senior local councillor, the personal relations established between chief councillors and SDC's Chair was one of the main factors in the development of political and planning arrangements in the city. As he commented in interview

Once we had developed the personal contact we were able to be more forthright in our negotiations. We could tell SDC that we simply didn't agree with them and we would argue behind closed doors.

The very existence of such an agreement was, in part, down to the nature of relations established between particular individuals

from SCC, others in the local political community and key personnel in SDC. Local councillors, for example, were under intense local political pressure to be more confrontational with SDC (see, for example, Sheffield Labour Group Minutes, 1989, 1990), whilst there were some in SDC who felt that SCC had little to offer—indeed, in institutional terms there was no legal or political requirement to engage with local authorities in anything more than an informative role (*Hansard*, 1987). This was exemplified by the perspectives of the Leader of SCC who commented in interview that

Originally we had to deal with SDC on an unfavourable basis. But it was clear to us that there were Sheffield guys given powers and resources that we would have owned but we had to get on and work with them as individuals and make them realise that they needed us ... The fact that there were key local guys in there at the top [of SDC] that I had known for years made my job easier. They wanted to work with us, despite what central government was saying and that was partly as a result of these close personal relations.

These organisational dynamics, therefore, had an impact on the particular forms of local politics that were established in Sheffield.

The development of institutional relations in Cardiff Bay also exemplifies the central role of particular actors, working through their social contexts, in helping to shape aspects of local governance. In Cardiff Bay, two local authorities, South Glamorgan County Council (SGCC) and Cardiff City Council (CCC) were originally involved in the establishment of CBDC. The relationships developed with CBDC were very different. SGCC had been highly proactive in regard to CBDC. From the outset, they established a series of links with the Corporation and were even involved in calling for its inception in the mid 1980s. SGCC's Chief Executive was recruited by CBDC in 1991 and represented the most visible symbol of relations between the two organisations.

SGCC's Economic Development Committee were active in establishing contacts so that every planning application made by CBDC, for example, came to them for discussion, as did CBDC's general plans and strategies. Relations between CCC and CBDC, on the other hand, were more confrontational with less liaison and frequent complaints that CBDC was acting in a covert, single minded and non-discursive manner.

One of the principal causes of these differences were the individual relationships established between key personnel within local institutions. The Head of SGCC's Economic Development Committee, Paddy Kitson, was particularly positive about the opportunities opened up by the establishment of CBDC. He noted that

This is just what the city needed, the area used to be a nightmare and now there's an agency with clear objectives and agendas and this is a real opportunity to give the city what it needs.

Kitson established contacts and working relationships with planning officers and executives at CBDC in an attempt to influence the latter and modify its policies to suit the objectives of SGCC. He consistently supported CBDC in the local media and within city partnerships and was eventually promoted on to its executive. Representatives of CBDC were particularly positive about his contribution and the relationships that had been developed with CBDC as a consequence. The Chief Executive commented that

We have always had a very positive working relationship with SGCC. They have been active partners of ours and we have developed close links through Paddy [Kitson] which have helped us to initiate policy programmes.

SGCC, through Kitson, consistently supported CBDC's most controversial plans, such as the building of the Cardiff Bay Barrage, the construction of local highways and the building of a new boulevard in the face of local community hostility. In return, SGCC has been able to have an influence on ele-

ments of CBDC's strategy—for example, the construction of a local school in area, traffic-calming measures and the broad emphasis of local economic development policy. Whilst these projects owe their existence to a combination of wider and local decision-making processes, the extent to which co-operative links between individuals have influenced the nature of local politics and working relationships is one factor in explaining the particular configurations of development that have taken place.

Links with CCC, on the other hand, were much less constructive. CCC had traditionally been dominated by an active, more critical, set of local politicians, opposed to the principles and strategies of CBDC. The former head of CCC, for example, was particularly critical of the CBDC and remarked that

They are very secretive. They tell us the bare minimum and although they say they work alongside us, they *de facto* do they wish ... They have sometimes threatened to call in the Secretary of State when we have disagreed with them ... There is little in the way of co-operative politics round here.

Such sentiments were reiterated by executives at CBDC who found CCC more obstructive and difficult to work with than SGCC. As the Chair noted

One has to look at the individuals that make up these organisations. Some in CCC had a political grievance against us ... this has always affected our relationship with the organisation as they have been unwilling to engage in a constructive manner.

Clearly, the activities of CCC and CBDC actors in this context are institutionalised and such tensions do not simply reflect the behaviourist characteristics of individuals *per se*. However, the differences between SGCC's and CCC's approaches were not reflections of institutional divisions of power and resources, in a functional *a priori* sense, but were, in part, contingent on the perspec-

tives, roles and actions of the actors themselves.

Other forms of influence were also developed in the two cities in which actors reflexively adopted strategies to engage with the UDCs. In Cardiff, although tensions had developed between CCC and CBDC, CCC officers and councillors noted that they had established more co-operative ways of working at officer level. As the former leader of CCC remarked in interview

Our officers have very good relations with the CBDC but the trouble is that for us there is very little in the way of feedback, many of the meetings are confidential and have very little in the way of integrating people like me ... At this officer level things have become increasingly inter-linked, but its down to individuals, who says what and when to whom.

In Sheffield, SCC representatives noted that they had developed a similar strategy. SCC officers and Board members regularly turned to SDC officers, with whom they had long-established relations, to look for ways of influencing projects. In detailed planning discussions over, for example, new shopping centres or roads, relations developed at officer level influenced the outcomes of policy decisions. SDC possessed local planning authority powers, but SCC maintained some regulatory functions—for example, its status as Highway Authority. This fragmentation of powers increased the importance of inter-organisational and intersubjective relations in the outcomes of planning decisions. The former leader of SCC identified, in interview, what he considered to be the key role of planning officers in SDC

SDC decides its strategies in a different way from SCC. Its executive officers work much more independently, with scant regard for the Board.

The Head of SCC's Planning Committee similarly noted that

We felt we could do more detailed things with officers, particularly over planning

issues in which roads and infrastructure were of importance and we felt we could make a genuine contribution.

These sentiments were reflected by those of SDC's Grant Programme Manager who had also formerly worked at SCC

I get on very easily with SCC officers and councillors as I know them so well. They were the same people I got on with or didn't. Despite various political differences at Board level, at officer levels we have always got on very well indeed ... We also have complementary power and this influenced what SDC has been able to do.

So, for example, SDC was keen to encourage the development of leisure facilities but, through negotiations with SCC officers, these plans were scaled down after criticisms that they may displace activities from other parts of the city. This exemplifies the ways in which actors respond to their social contexts and attempt to find ways of changing projects, influencing actions and redirecting resources. SDC officers, in the latter stages of the organisation's existence (the organisation was wound up in 1997), were keen, for instance, to initiate local programmes in an unco-ordinated, non-strategic manner so that unspent resources would not have to be returned to central government. This was done so that, as one planning officer put it, "the money would stay here for the good of Sheffield ... that was my first priority". It was even admitted by some interviewees that bureaucratic procedures in, for example, providing detailed cost-benefit analyses had been 'waived' as part of this process. Some small businesses benefited from 'fast track' environmental grant awards and planning decisions and procedures were streamlined for new investment proposals, particularly in areas which had been relatively untouched by the regeneration.

This section has indicated that one aspect of contemporary changes in local governance that needs to be addressed for a fuller understanding of local political processes is the

ways in organisational practices help to shape the practical forms of policy-making processes and implementation that take place. It has highlighted the reflexive role of actors in interpreting policy programmes and the influence this has had on the development of wider (institutional) relations and operations in the two cities. Thus, the emergence of local partnerships between elected and non-elected institutions needs to be understood as a process working on a number of different levels. An examination of institutional structures, resources and powers, whilst fundamental to any study of partnership relations, must be supplemented by empirical investigation into how reflexive actors work in and through their institutional contexts. This is further exemplified by the internal relations that exist within organisations and it is to these and their influence on the politics of local economic development in the city that the paper now turns.

### **Internal Dynamics within the UDCs and Relations with Local Communities**

In both UDCs, there were a variety of internal tensions concerning the direction that policy programmes should take. Interviews demonstrated that officers working with recipient communities often adopted a different policy emphasis from the executive individuals in more senior positions. These differences occurred on policy issues in which there were direct intersubjective relations between officers and clients. For example, CBDC's Chief Training Officer emphasised the key role of the CBDC as a socio-economic regeneration agency for whom the involvement of communities in the sharing of socioeconomic benefits was a necessary, rather than a contingent, part of a successful regeneration strategy. As he commented in interview

It depends on what you see the role of the regeneration process as. A lot of CBDC people feel that too much money is being spent on local communities. When investment is secured the rest follows naturally.

But my view is very different. If you are securing investment, then the image of the CBDC is very important and we must ensure that community investments are involved. There has been an increasing realisation that as well as the grants budget there also needs to be money spent on developing grass roots.

Similar tensions were reported by SDC officers working with local SMEs under the threat of compulsory purchase. One officer noted that

There were elements within SDC that wanted a full steam ahead programme ... small, local, businesses were in the way. But those of us who were working with the businesses on an individual basis were more realistic. We understood their positive value to the regeneration and the city as a whole.

In both instances, the 'elements' which wanted to pursue more aggressive strategies were identified as the senior executives and policy-makers. There was a perceived tension between the more 'visionary' aspects of the regeneration programmes and the ways in which they were to be implemented. For example, planning officers in Sheffield quickly realised that co-operation with the existing business community was essential for the success of the strategy (see Raco, 2000). A planning officer recalled that

Dealing with individual firms in a co-operative manner was vital for the regeneration because a lot of their suggestions about how they should be treated were sensible, grounded and saved us a lot of unnecessary haggling between ourselves and local firms ... Within a limited time-scale, SDC had to ensure that it avoided protracted legal proceedings.

Yet, it is difficult not to contrast the views of the planning officers with those of senior officers on the same topic. When some small businesses criticised and challenged SDC's actions, the responses of senior executives

were highly critical. SDC's Chief Executive, for example, commented in interview that

We are totally market-oriented. We try to give our customers what they want ... SMEs influenced our strategy not one iota. Those who complained are those intent on running their businesses into the ground and looking to us to bail them out!

Similarly, the Chair expressed the opinion that

There were problems with some businesses that were entirely unnecessary ... They were out to cause trouble and it is something we just had to live with, put on one side and get on with our programme.

In response to these tensions, junior officers in both UDCs adopted reflexive approaches. In Sheffield, the role of junior planning officers was essential to the outcome of SDC's strategy. The crash in national and local property markets undermined many of the original planned sources of income for development. Within an 18-month period, the fate of 400 existing SMEs became an issue of paramount importance. The relationships which SDC developed with the small business community were essential to the levels of economic activity in the regeneration area. SDC's planning officers were all former employees in Sheffield City Council's Planning Department. Many SMEs had already developed close working relationships with these officers in their previous positions. These individuals, therefore, brought with them experience of dealing with local SMEs, professional capacities as former local authority officers and a continuity in relationships over a period of time. One officer who liaised with local SMEs over the impact the regeneration would have on their existence, had worked with local firms for over 20 years. Hence, officers sought to use, in Lipsky's (1980) terms, their discretion and autonomy to mollify the impact of regeneration proposals, such as compulsory purchase orders, on the local business community.

A number of SMEs suggested that the

nature of these personal, intersubjective contacts seemed to dispel their fears of the SDC and its programmes and were happy to work with, rather than against the organisation. Some owner-managers took the opportunity to sell their businesses; others engaged in negotiations in which they were able, in a number of cases, to tailor SDC's available resources to match their particular requirements. Officers played a key role in such discussions and were primarily responsible for allaying fears, engaging local firms in the regeneration process and creating a discursive environment in which local firms felt as though they were a key part of the regeneration process. For example, officers tried to encourage firms to apply for environmental improvement grants which both upgraded the quality of local commercial premises and enhanced the aesthetic appearance of the wider environment. They gave firms prior warning of executive intentions and decisions and provided advice on the most effective forms of appeal or bureaucratic challenges to policies.

The SDC officers interviewed demonstrated differences of opinion with their executive managers and felt that too often they were left to pick up the pieces of organisational overconfidence and hype. One officer who had previously worked for SCC for 3 years and before that had been employed as an engineer in the Don Valley for 15 years, indicated that he had had differences of opinion with others in SDC. He was particularly critical of the inflated expectations generated when SDC was established. The property boom in the late 1980s had encouraged talk of the SDC being able to generate hundreds of millions of pounds in land sales. The officer recalled feeling that

I knew the place and I knew that this was never going to happen. SDC was a victim of its own hype and I think much of this came from above where people believed their own rhetoric about what the organisation could achieve and how it was going to operate.

Once difficulties emerged regarding the ef-

fectiveness of the original strategy, working with local businesses became more of a priority. As a planning officer commented

I sympathised with the SMEs that came to us and there was a genuine common spirit of help ... I'd say that because of my background I sympathised more with these businesses than did SDC and we managed to persuade SDC to withdraw a number of CPOs as we convinced them that they proceed in a different, more competitive way.

Much of what is noted above is revealing about the internal differences within the organisation. The Officer's use of language refers to SDC in the third person as opposed to executives who use the first. The SDC is referred to as 'them' and put in opposition to 'us' (the officer and the local community individuals represented). This demonstrates not only the variations in attitudes that existed within SDC, but also the different approach to regeneration with those of officers based on a more embedded, interactive emphasis with local players.

In Cardiff, local officers similarly sought to demonstrate that their ways of working with, rather than against, local policy communities, were effective in delivering programmes and could help to legitimise further the local role of CBDC by providing positive experiences of their activities for local people. CBDC's chief training officer, for example, described how

Through our new programmes, we are demonstrating to the local community that people can access employment from the regeneration. This not only benefits local communities, but also provides some of us with the opportunity to tell those elements in CBDC opposed to such programmes, that this is doing our image and reputation a lot of good locally and more widely.

There was a discernible shift in CBDC's approach to local training programmes and the work of officers at lower levels of the organisation have been an essential component in the changes. For example, pilot ESF

projects, initiated by officers developing local partnerships, were adopted by senior executives and became the most important source of local training programmes for local communities. New partnerships and patterns were established in which chief executives of CBDC, the local authorities and the local Enterprise Agency now develop strategies for attracting EU funds and leave officers to work out the details.

The UDCs' relationships with local communities in both cities were fluctuating and diverse. As noted above, both were established as primarily 'active', effective localist organisations, driven by economic objectives to regenerate deprived inner-city areas. As time went by, greater emphasis was placed on business and residential communities as much of the hoped-for, externally funded, recapitalisation of the areas failed to emerge and local socioeconomic resources became of increasing importance (see Imrie and Thomas, 1999). New institutional spaces were established in both cities, through partnerships, in which communities were given quasi-formal status as 'stake-holders' in the wider regeneration. For the UDCs' part, community incorporation enabled policy programmes to carry a higher degree of political legitimacy in an attempt to avoid claims of being 'parachuted in' to their areas. For some officers, it also meant that more effective, locally sensitive strategies could be undertaken. For community groups, the establishment of such relations signalled new opportunities for accessing and influencing decision-making processes, particularly through informal channels of access.

These examples demonstrate the hybridity of institutions such as UDCs and the complexities of processes of embeddedness that can take place. UDCs were made up of individuals from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds and the ways in which they implemented and developed their programmes were critically dependent on their particular activities in the contexts in which they operated. Hence, the strategies of both UDCs in areas such as training and business support were implemented in ways which

reflected both formal structures and priorities and existing socioeconomic relations. Strategic development was, therefore, shaped in and through empirical practice, as well as being imposed by senior policy-makers working to wider strategic objectives and frameworks. Once again, a thorough understanding of institutional activity requires a multilevel understanding of implementation processes.

### **Conclusions: Re-examining the Role of Individuals in the New Local Governance**

This paper has demonstrated that one key element in the nature of contemporary local governance, which is often overlooked or underplayed, is the role that organisational dynamics, developed in and through particular socioeconomic contexts, have in influencing the types of programmes and strategies adopted by institutions at the local level. It has demonstrated how social relations are articulated through organisational practices. This interpretation has implications for the nature of local decision-making processes. The internal and external intersubjective relations which develop within and between organisations and community groups can have a defining impact on the nature of local politics. These relations themselves are established differentially in different places according to the existing nature of local social, economic and political contexts and the particular ways in which new institutions become embedded within them. In both Cardiff and Sheffield, the UDCs interacted with their local environments in a number of ways. Working relationships were established with local authorities and other institutions; attempts were made to tailor centrally directed policy objectives to match local problems in a more effective manner; different elements within the UDCs developed different understandings of local problems and, in some cases, shaped UDC policy from the 'bottom-up'; relations were established with communities, albeit often in a circumscribed and selective manner; and local actors played a key role in shaping

organisational practices, perceptions and programmes.

However, it is important not to exaggerate the influence of autonomous agents as though their actions take place outside wider social, economic and political structures of action. As Coleman (1996, p. x) notes, “individuals’ roles need to be identified in the context of existing social relations”. It is only in such contexts that the concept of individual autonomy possesses meaning (see Lucas, 1993). This study has attempted to show how actors, working in particular contexts, can play a key role in shaping those contexts and defining the forms that they take. The evidence shows that they are not simply nodes in wider socio-political networks, whose replacement makes little or any difference to the ways in which those networks operate. Instead, it suggests that in order to understand the ways in which organisations operate in practice, empirical evidence, concerning the ways that particular practices operate, is required for a fuller understanding of the processes lying behind themes such as the changing nature of local governance. Individuals at all levels of an organisation, particularly those in the most powerful positions, can challenge and change the ways in which its functions are carried out. Replacing the actors can, in and of itself, change the organisational contexts in which they operate (Giddens, 1991; King, 1999).

These findings have implications for future research. The relationships between organisational action and the agents who implement programmes—with their own particular biographies, ways of working, ideological perspectives and capacities for action—represent one dimension of the forms that the new local governance may take. Organisational theory can be used to develop a broader understanding of processes of institutionalisation within local governance, spatial variations in policy delivery and local policy-making processes. If used in a manner complementary to an emphasis on wider socio-political relations, it enables a more sophisticated understanding of contemporary local political processes to be devel-

oped. As Imrie and Raco (1999, p. 51) suggest, the operation of contemporary quango institutions

within the British cities has, in many ways, demonstrated the continuities and hybridities of local economic development policy-making and delivery.

Organisational dynamics represent one element of this hybridity of local governance. They can play a key role in mediating the tensions between places and spaces of governance which authors such as Taylor (1999) have identified as one of the key aspects of linking civil society and state institutions. They may also be one element in the continuities, as well as the changes, in local governance and the ways in which these processes play themselves out in different places.

## Notes

1. Pringle’s (1989) study of the role of female secretaries in organisations and their ways of dealing with overtly sexist behaviour from male employers exemplifies the forms that such resistance can take. Another example of the key role of particular individuals in shaping the outcomes of policies and the experiences of client-groups is Lidstone’s (1994) study of housing rationing to the homeless in the UK. She demonstrates how both formal and informal norms and rules vary between different housing officers depending on the types of individual making relevant decisions. They may be a differential application of standard procedures; deliberate and accidental misunderstandings over the rules and legislative requirements; or a lack of knowledge, concerning procedures, on the part of the claimants. There are also more subtle, subjective forms of rationing in operation. Officers may try to deter applicants from making claims on their finite resources by providing selective, filtered, information or acting in an off-putting manner. She found that the individual officers brought their own prejudices, particularly in regard to single mothers who often underwent a series of ‘humiliating’ investigations into their circumstances—treatment not given to families or couples who were seen as more ‘deserving’. The study calls for a

greater focus upon the relationships between housing officers and applicants as it is a

critical dimension that is often lost in accounts of local authority responses to homelessness (Lidstone, 1994, p. 470).

Similarly, Edwards (1994) shows how those working in Housing Aid Offices attempted to create informal atmospheres and collapse the boundaries between clients and advisors. The study indicated that for some, particularly between those who worked as volunteers and/or had university backgrounds, there was a tendency to cultivate 'supporting' identities in which they would act as 'ordinary' people working with clients against bureaucracy. This demonstrates that there are a whole series of intersubjective dynamics operating within institutions which help to explain their activities on the ground. It is the relationships between rules and regulations and individuals which are central to this understanding. In Lidstone's study, rules were often left deliberately vague to increase the levels of discretionary capacity for individual officers. In other organisations, bureaucratic rules are developed in ways which seek to limit discretion, promoting uniformity over fragmentation. For example, recent education reforms which have sought to standardise curriculums in schools have sought to limit the ability of individual teachers to determine their own courses. The construction of such relations is, therefore, inherently political in that they involve choices over power relations and the ability of individuals to influence processes (see Halford, 1994; Wright, 1994).

2. The characteristics of individual 'types' have been of central importance to this shift to new modes of governance. Local government officials were often portrayed as inflexible, lacking dynamism and innovative capacities, and wedded to bureaucratic rules and procedures (Cochrane, 1993). In contrast, certain types of private-sector individual have been characterised as innovative, entrepreneurial and productive, able to break down bureaucratic procedures to 'get things done' with maximum efficiency and effectiveness (Peck, 1995).
3. Urban Development Corporations were established in the inner areas of 13 British cities in the 1980s. They were given planning powers and resources to facilitate the economic regeneration of their designated areas, primarily through preparing land for property developers. They *de facto* took powers and resources away from local authorities that had previously been charged with a local economic regeneration function and were dominated by Executive Boards, appointed by central government

to oversee forms of regeneration in line with wider political, ideological and economic agendas.

4. The coming of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC) in 1987, represented an opportunity to expand on the existing redevelopment proposals for the area. It was given the task of regenerating 2700 acres of derelict land in the former Docklands of the city. Its strategy represented an ambitious programme of change with the creation of 3-4 million square feet of offices, 5-6 million square feet of industrial space (including hi-tech and modern business sites), 6000 houses and a range of tourist and leisure facilities (Thomas and Imrie, 1993). It has represented a continuation of local and regional state plans for the modernisation of the city and an emphasis on the city as capital of Wales. As the strategy (CBDC, 1989, p. 3) makes clear:

The excellent location and communications in Cardiff, its environment, public and private services as Capital, give the city its national and regional role. These advantages and the 'Gateway to Wales' theme can be used to stimulate inward investment in such fields as commerce, industry, the media and tourism, housing and services.

Hence CBDC's stated goal to

establish Cardiff internationally as a superlative maritime city, which will stand in comparison with any similar city in the world enhancing the economic well-being of Cardiff and of Wales as a whole.

To create this "superlative maritime city" CBDC has focused on encouraging flagship investments, such as company headquarters, hotels and other high-quality service-based forms of economic activity. To fuel such development, CBDC, along with other local institutions, has initiated major infrastructure projects, in particular the building of a new highway linking the Bay to the City Centre, known as Bute Avenue, and the construction of a Barrage across the Taff and Ely estuaries to create a freshwater lake around which prestigious property developments could be established and a leisure industry created.

5. The Sheffield Development Corporation was established in 1988. It was given planning authority status and funded to regenerate a section of industrial land, east of Sheffield City Centre, known as the Lower Don Valley. This area had traditionally been the stronghold of metal manufacturing in the city and, up until the early 1980s, provided thousands of jobs and represented a thriving industrial area of

metal, tool and engineering industries. However, the area underwent a process of severe deindustrialisation through the 1980s, with over 60 000 jobs lost. SDC was charged with regenerating 2000 acres of land and given a budget of £50 million over 7 years. It had the target of creating 20 000 new jobs and leveraging in as much inward investment as possible. The regeneration represented a continuation of property-led regeneration strategies which had characterised other inner-city areas of the UK over the 1980s. Environmental upgrading and the preparation of 'brownfield sites' were to be a catalyst for a recapitalisation of the inner city by the private sector. In particular, SDC looked to upgrade the local road infrastructure and proposed to build a four-lane highway through the middle of the valley.

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