

Abstract

In the specific context of economic development and spatial policy (including urban policy), UK central Government continues to deploy principles of 'competition' and 'competitiveness' as the dominant discourse and *modus operandi* in its governance of sub-national inter-territorial relations. Yet, exactly what it means 'to be competitive', in this context, remains poorly specified by the policy and academic community alike, while the potentially negative consequences of this policy position remain largely unexplored.

The starting point for the thesis is that this is a long overdue research project in two respects. First, there is a need to develop alternative conceptualisations which challenge the narrow and simplistic interpretations of 'competitiveness' currently defining inter-territorial relations in the UK. Second, in terms of empirical inquiry, there is a need to investigate, trans-nationally, the existence of alternative discourses and models of sub-national economic development and inter-territorial relations to those which prevail and predominate in the UK.

To address the first of these tasks, conceptual tools are developed which draw on two, very different, bodies of literature. The evolutionary economics literature theorises the path-dependent, place-specific and dynamic nature of the knowledge development and learning process. These principles can be broadened and extended to accommodate the evolutionary development of '*economic society*' taken to be the particular time, - and space, - context bound configuration of the capital-labour-state relation which defines and demarcates each particular form of political economy and underpins geographies of *diversity*. This diversity can be extended to accommodate geographies of *reflexivity*: a notion which has not yet been adequately theorised or empirically investigated in academic research. The second literature addresses the important question of scale. It takes the construction of scale and inter-scalar relations to be essentially a political process and notes the inherent contradictions in, on the one hand, the politically driven construction of borders and boundaries which demarcate scale and, on the other, the interactive and interdependent nature of economic processes themselves. This is an important dimension of the 'competitiveness' critique.

Empirically, these themes are explored via an interrogation of the urban political-economy and through the particular cases of Manchester and Lyon. The thesis concludes with some reflections and recommendations addressed to the UK policy community.

KEY WORDS : Cities, competitiveness policy, evolutionary economics, scale, reflexivity.