The Role of Events in Driving Policy Change in the Governance of York 1966-2011

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Abstract

This paper derives from a continuing doctoral study into the contemporary history of how the local management of the drivers of change, specifically, conservation, tourism and the wider economy developed in the historic city of York during a period of dramatic economic and cultural realignment. These drivers are characterised by a mutual interdependence in sustaining investment in development but are also subject to significantly different political, economic and cultural objectives and motivations by those actors who promote and manage change. The focus is on the development of local governance defined as the transition from hierarchical forms of government to more horizontal partnership approaches. The work to date suggests that the process of change may be episodic, driven by key events such as significant policy reviews, physical developments and factory closures. This paper suggests a three part categorisation of important events; namely as spurs to action, as economic drivers of change in themselves and finally as validators of policy decisions.

Globalisation and Localities

As a consequence of enormous technological change which has enabled the globalisation of the world economy over the last 40 to 50 years, cities have seen their employment base face often overwhelming challenges, which in some cases have led to catastrophic decline. Others have built a new economic structure by proactively capitalising on opportunities from wherever they arose. These have tended to be in the areas of consumption –tourism, retail and leisure – and the 'knowledge economy' utilising those emerging technologies for new products and services. Success has depended on more opportunistic or entrepreneurial interventions to enable economic development which requires a more collaborative approach both within and between public institutions and with the private sector.

Central to this transition has been the re-emergence of the importance of place in economic geography. Up to the 1960's, the problems of cities were seen as largely spatial and characterised by concerns about congestion, the housing stock and the desire to separate areas for living and working through the land use planning system. Spatial proximity was devalued and the decentralisation of the city, mainly through market forces, but also through publically funded New Towns and regional policy, was accepted as a desirable objective. The economy saw steady growth and tight labour markets. Mass production, economies of scale and internalisation of supply and service provision within firms and organisations was the norm, leading to an essentially bureaucratic rather than market led economic coordination. Economic and social issues were largely addressed at national government level and not treated as spatial issues(Gordon & Buck, 2005).

This consensus began to break down in the 1960's initially with concern about specific communities in the city, often associated with race issues, but in the 1970's spatial policy was radically reassessed as the economic and social problems of the city escalated with deindustrialisation and the transfer of manufacturing to areas of cheap labour, often overseas. Cities were beginning to be seen as a part of global economic system rather than more self-contained or bounded units in a system of urban hierarchy. What were once seen as local problems now appeared to be driven by global forces requiring a reconsideration of the approach to economic and social policy and the processes of government (Amin & Thrift, 2002).

Cities across the world with a traditional manufacturing base experienced an increasing level of job losses, deindustrialisation and a growth of social problems in the 1980's, as global economic forces continued to reduce those cities' competitiveness. However it was clear that some locations were achieving higher levels of economic performance capitalising on the new knowledge economy including places such as London and California and some smaller locations such as Cambridge UK (Quince, 1985). In the 1990's the writings of Krugman(1991), Porter (1998)and others began to identify local factors such as the economies of scale arising from agglomeration of businesses in a locality or clusters of specific industries which might provide competitive advantages for individual cities and point a way forward from a process of continuing decline (Amin & Thrift, 2002). For enterprises operating in the new global markets, it was asserted that a firm's performance was influenced by the attributes of its location and that urban concentrations of economic activity and population mattered. This provided a wider pool of labour, shared inputs, supporting industries and services and a flow of information and ideas. A rational for a spatial policy emerged that focused on exploiting indigenous strengths , based on endogenous growth theory, which encouraged investment in human capital and research to encourage knowledge spillovers and innovation (Turok, 2005).

Concepts such as local clusters of new businesses in emerging sectors (Porter, 2003) and a 'creative class' concentrating in cities with strong cultural strengths (Florida, 2002) driven by f local connectivity and knowledge spillover, offered a policy prescription that empowered localities to encourage a new knowledge economy to some degree independently of national economic and political institutions. The need to create an environment to support local connectivity between institutions and businesses and to address local supply side blockages suggested a move forward to new forms of governance was required.

This perspective was part of a wider understanding that the world was becoming more reliant on networks. Horizontal relationships within companies, government and, institutions were of growing importance relative to more traditional hierarchies(Castells, 2010). Rhodes's (1997) identified the growing importance of policy networks challenging the Westminster model of government. These trends are summarised by Stoker (2004) as a move from 'government' to 'governance', with less reliance on vertical power relationships for administration and economic development

and more on horizontal interventions to promote local collaboration and interaction. This has placed a greater reliance on the willingness of local institutions whether public or private to work together, and this relies to a great extent on the capacity of those organisations' leaders. Theoretical concepts such as institutional capacity (Healey, Cars, Madanipour, & De Magalhaes, 2002) or institutional thickness(Amin & Thrift, 1995) have emerged to explain patterns of the relative effectiveness of governance approaches. Limits have however been identified to this approach , emphasising that government , especially in the UK where central control over finance and policy is especially strong , still plays a critical role (Davies, 2011).

Drivers of change in Historic cities

This challenging environment provided the general context for the governance of historic cities which however had to manage a specific mix of drivers of change that posed their own particular set of problems. Historic cities experienced an early effect of globalisation, where a shift in culture towards heritage particularly in the western world , allied with the declining relative cost of travel and increase in leisure time, led to an explosion of tourist interest in historic places (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). For the keepers and managers of historic assets , especially those concerned with preserving and conserving the historic environment for its aesthetic and historic importance , ideas of heritage and the associated mass tourism appeared to be a threat (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000).

From the 1980's it was also becoming apparent that historic cities were not necessarily immune from the effects of deindustrialisation and global market forces and their general economies appeared to weaken or be under threat. Historic cities such as Chester and York were adopting policies, similar to those utilised by larger industrial centres to actively develop the economy that was less dependent on the historic environment. This exposed the need to address the competing balance between policies of growth or restraint (Strange, 1996). Historic cities were beginning to use their heritage assets to shape an image of place to further economic goals, finding that it could be a successful factor in the attraction of a wider range of economic activities an objective that was related to a desire to reduce the scale of dependence on employment opportunities in tourism (Graham et al., 2000). This use of heritage in this way and the desire to exploit growth opportunities has shifted the management of historic cities from a conservation led approach to one which Strange (1999) suggests of 'post-conservation' where growth is seen as a desirable objective and the belief that its impacts can be managed, within a discourse of sustainable development.

Impact on Governance

These three drivers of change in historic cities of conservation, tourism and economic development were clearly mutually dependent yet the actors within each sector could be quite separate groups with quite divergent objectives. The concept of preserving historic buildings began to emerge towards the end of the nineteenth century and was

largely promoted by national building preservation organisations led by elites who sought to achieve their objectives through national legislation. Similarly local preservation movements were also promoted by local elites. The idea of preservation and subsequently conservation only really became more widely popular from the late 1960's as reaction to the redevelopment of cities (Delafons, 1997).

The business structure of the tourism sector is generally made up of a large number of businesses and public bodies supplying a range of services such as attractions, accommodation, food service, retailing and a wide range of support services. There is rarely one dominant player. Governments have wanted to stimulate and support the industry to promote regional development but tend to concentrate resources on marketing. For the local industry there is significant self-interest in building collaborative networks for marketing , tourism management and advocacy of the needs of the sectors (Hall, 2008).

Initiatives to promote local economic development were largely implemented by local authorites in the 1980's with limited involvement of other parties. Subsequently the spectrum of influence increased particularly as government both made resources available and also established new local and regional agencies. These required local authorites to establish wider partnership arrangements. These more prescriptive approaches tended to lose momentum but more locally driven collaborations with the private sector and other public institutions did achieve more traction (Davies, 2001).

In summary the approaches to local governance within these three drivers of change varied. Conservation tended to be hierarchical whilst for tourism it is largely lateral or horizontal in nature. Local economic development retained a mix of the two approaches depending mainly on the scale of government resources that might be utilised.

Redefining the Boundaries of the Event

This paper uses some early findings from a case study of York to suggest that events may have played a significant role in creating wider understanding of the development issues in this historic city with particular emphasis on conservation, tourism and economic development. Events may also in some form stimulate action or confirmed the direction of policy travel. The research is specifically examining local governance and some initial observations can be made on the relationship of events to stimulating either changes on the approach to governance or reinforcing processes already in place.

York is one of Britain's premier historic cities with a Roman, Viking, mediaeval and Georgian heritage that largely survived the depredations suffered by other cities in the 19th and 20th centuries. The survival, and subsequent preservation and conservation of that heritage have provided the city with a set of historic assets that is recognised as of national and international significance. York had always benefited from some form of tourism as a religious centre, for horse racing and its historic interest. This

industry grew substantially from the 1960's reinforced by the opening of the National Railway Museum in 1975 and new archaeological discoveries especially from the Viking era which were incorporated into a new attraction, The Jorvik Centre opening in 1984. The role of the City as a retail centre has grown significantly as has its food service and night time economy.

York however was also an industrial city. It was an important railway centre and manufacturer of railway carriages from the nineteenth century. Confectionary was an even larger employer with two major firms Rowntrees and Terrys established in the city. Manufacturing at its peak provided a third of all jobs. The railway carriage works closed in 1976 and Terrys in 2006, whilst Rowntrees was taken over by Nestle and overtime job numbers have fallen.

The establishment of the University of York in 1963 was an important step in providing new forms of employment and economic opportunity. From the early 1990's local economic development policy gave significant emphasis York on developing the science base and seeking spin off economic activity including new firm formation.

Initial documentary research suggests that the process of change has an episodic quality in that specific events appear to either act as triggers to new policy directions or in some ways reinforce the thinking underlying them. This paper sets out some initial thinking as to how this might contribute to the idea of redefining the boundaries of the event. An initial categorisation is proposed namely where events are:

Spurs to policy change

- Economic drivers of change
- Validate policy directions
- Four cases (the last including two examples) are looked at in this context.
- Spurs to Policy Change- the Esher report

The Esher report (Esher, 1968) is seen by many as a landmark in conservation policy in York. Richard Crossman, the Minister of Housing and Local Government in the early years of the 1964-70 Labour Government, initiated in 1966 ,four studies in conservation for York, Chichester, Chester and Bath. Lionel Brett, Viscount Esher, was appointed to undertake the York study. This was part of a general policy direction to take a more comprehensive approach to conservation beyond the focus on individual buildings. This included legislation to establish Conservation Areas and to integrate the regulation of buildings listed for historic or architectural interest into the planning system.

The announcement of the study was not well received by the City of York Council, and indeed the local financial contribution to the study had to be paid by the York Civic Trust. The study which took two years involved wide public discussion, and was in effect   a new planning document for the city centre. It achieved a wide consensus of

support including in the end that of the local authority. The study included designs for redevelopment within the historic core with housing schemes that established a new design benchmark for construction in sensitive historic locations. The government gave extensive grant aid to implement the report.

The outcome of this event was that conservation became quite clearly the primary planning objective for the City. It initiated a comprehensive approach to conservation planning and underpinned a substantial change in opinion both within institutions and in the public mood about conservation which became the dominant theme in the planning of York for the next decade. This was not unique to York as opinions changed during a similar period throughout the western world. In governance terms, it demonstrated that policy and leadership in regard to conservation matters was hierarchical and driven by national and local elites. It asserted a national interest in, and control of, York's historic assets.

Spurs to Policy Change- Factory closures and takeovers

York adopted an initial economic development policy in 1983 largely in response to rising unemployment. It was a prime objective of a new Labour Party administration but with broad cross party support. A range of initiatives were put in place. Business support measures were undertaken in partnership with the private sector but other activities such as city promotion (inward investment) were undertaken by the authority alone. The local authority gave little support to tourism.

The country as a whole experienced a major losses in manufacturing industry in the 1980's and whilst this did not immediately affect York it provided a base for concern when Nestle took over Rowntrees in a contested bid in 1988 and when the railway carriage works were privatised in 1989 and sold to ABB. A sense of uncertainty was attached to these employers whom had been central to the York economy for a century and, along with Terrys, were responsible for most of the manufacturing employment. The long term job security that had been a part of the York labour market began to look less sure. Its effect on governance was that 'Partnerships for Prosperity' was established where a much greater involvement of the private sector in inward investment activity was achieved although on an informal basis.

In the early 1990's it was becoming increasingly clear that ABB was unlikely to achieve the level of orders it needed and was very vulnerable. The 'railway works' was a symbol of York's economic culture to many residents , especially in the Labour Party, and looking for new ways to approach economic development were already underway in 1995 . It finally closed in 1996. The first was to place greater emphasis on the potential of University and the science base for employment. The second move was to bring local authority resources into the support of tourism. Two initiatives , Science City York and First Stop York (for Tourism) which were formal partnerships with the private sector and where the private sector really started to take on leadership roles. Another result of the closure was that government money via English Partnerships

and the Single Regeneration Budget started to support the City's development efforts and that led to a third initiative, York Inward Investment Board. This consolidated inward investment work under an equal partnership with the private sector. The City Council established an overall Economic Development Board in 1996 where the private sector was given equal status with Councillors on what was in effect a Council committee.

The next period when closures acted as events stimulating change was in 2006. In that year Terrys closed down although it had been in long decline in terms of job numbers for some years. British Sugar Corporation also shut although job losses were below 200. The latter had been an important feature on the skyline since the 1920's. At the same time Nestle Rowntree announced number of redundancies. By this time economic issues had diminished in importance especially as the national economy was doing well. However this concentration of bad news stimulated another round of partnership development with the establishment of the York Economic Partnership, the first one where the private sector was in a majority and really began to provide leadership.

This section has demonstrated that business closures and takeovers as events have been apparently quite critical as stimuli to the development of this area of activity and new forms of governance in economic development. Overtime there has also been a shift towards greater private sector involvement. Events effect what politicians seek to achieve but it may also in this instance shifted perspectives giving the private sector a greater role in leadership of the city.

Economic drivers of change – Jorvik Centre

In 1976 an archaeological dig started on a site vacated by a sweet factory adjacent to the city centre. The expectation was that this site would provide the first substantial evidence of the influence of the Vikings in York's history. This excavation coincided with and contributed to a revival of interest in the Viking period emphasising their culture and explorations rather than their bloodthirsty reputation. The dig, which was actively supported by the Prince of Wales, featured in a number of TV programmes. During the six year period of the dig, there were one million paying visitors to the site. When the time came to build a shopping centre, there was a clear commercial case for a visitor centre incorporated within the development to present the findings of the dig. This next step secured even greater external interest in that the Jorvik Centre, as it was named, utilised highly innovative methods of interpretation including cars moving through a 'Viking' village with the associated smells and noises. 200 journalists from around the world attended the opening in 1984 and the centre has attracted 12 million visitors since.

This is perhaps the most obvious 'event' as opposed to the wider usages of the term elsewhere in this paper. Whilst tourism was clearly a growing industry on York and beginning to impact on the city centre the volumes of visitors and the media interest

made this a recognisable event in the general sense. It may have been the key turning point in that it demonstrated that whilst York had always been attractive to visitors, the economic opportunities tourism presented for the city might be of a different order. In a theoretical sense it may have shown that the city could substantially benefit from the commodification of heritage.

Its impact on governance was more muted in that the City Council continued its policy of not considering that tourism would produce the quality of employment it was seeking and very little support was given to tourist promotion, The private sector thorough the Chamber of Commerce took up the reins and established the York Visitor and Conference Bureau in 1985 in order to promote the City and enable local businesses to take advantage of this economic opportunity. As set out above it was only in the early 1990's when it became clear that the traditional manufacturing sector was in serious trouble that the City Council began to commit to involvement in local initiatives to support tourism.

Validating Policy directions – new science based employers

Initial thinking about the economic potential of science based activities were being put forward in the 1980's nationally and the University of York started in that decade to explore the potential of a science park development on the campus. The university also began to seek to develop the concept of Bioscience York with the City Council as a mechanism to promote the city and the university. There was some degree of scepticism as to whether this approach had any economic benefit from within the leadership of the City Council and there was also opposition from within the University with concerns about academic independence. A site and development partners were identified for the science park and initially it was expected that development would have to be on a speculative basis. However it was announced in 1973 that Smith and Nephew, a healthcare firm, was planning to transfer its research and development activities from Hertfordshire to become the first tenant in the York Science Park. This involved the transfer of about 200 jobs.

In 1992 the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) announced that it was consolidating its laboratory activities into one organisation with 600 jobs, the Central Science Laboratory, and that it would be locating to a site six miles north east of York. Following that decision MAFF announced that it would be moving its offices concerned with plant health to a site in central York. The existence of a complementary science community within the university were important considerations in these decisions

The impact of these events demonstrated the real economic potential of the University's science base. They also provided a stimulus to the acceptance of the Science City York initiative which was also supported in part because of the concerns about the potential closure loss of the 'railway works'. This Science City York initiative was also a different approach to local governance as it was a formal partnership between two public institutions, the Council and the University of York but also

involved the business community. Overtime, representatives from Smith and Nephew and the Central science laboratory (now the Farm and Environment Research Agency –FERA) became involved as well.

Conclusions

The initial thoughts in this paper suggest that the boundaries of the event can be redefined to help explain the progress of change in a city. Change arises from long term economic forces, new cultural perspectives, politics and carefully considered policies and plans but events can also have a high profile role in those processes. They can act as fulcrums of change whether it is the realisation of economic potential as with the Jorvik Centre, new science based inward investment or as stimuli to action as was the case with factory closures. Further research is to be undertaken by interviewing some of those involved and this will test the degree to which change was episodic as initially set out in this paper.

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