

RSA Network Event, 23rd-24th October 2018 – Manchester (UK)

City and Regional Development Leadership beyond BREXIT: A Relational Perspective

AUTHORS

John Gibney, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, UK: e-mail at j.gibney@bham.ac.uk

Joyce Liddle, Northumbria University Business School, UK: e-mail at joyce.liddle@northumbria.ac.uk

John Shutt, Leeds Beckett Business School, Leeds e-mail at jshutt@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

There is considerable interest in the implications of BREXIT for sub-national development both in the UK and the EU more widely. Whilst there is a growing policy and academic literature on the local and regional consequences of BREXIT (See for example, Dickinson and Cox, 2016; Centre for Economic Performance, 2016; Barber, 2017; Barber and Jones, 2017; Bell, 2017; Local Government Association, 2017; North, 2017) – relatively little conceptual or empirical attention, however, has been paid to the new and emerging leadership challenges and opportunities for city and regional development after BREXIT.

Beneath the national scale, an important pan-Europeanising of sub-national working and partnering has been fostered over the past thirty years between cities and regions across Europe (Marlow, 2017) – driving the ready flow and exchange of ideas, knowledge and learning on/around ‘good’ socio-economic and environmental practice – and that has been a critical (and arguably underestimated) progressive feature of the wider UK/EU sub-national development experience. At a time of growing populism and a tendency to otherisation, this pan-European sub-national ‘coming together’ is important to maintain and grow, since irrespective of BREXIT - and as we argue through this paper - the interdependent and highly relational nature of complex economy, social and environment related (and public-private-third sector) policy problems require a refreshed conceptualising of a relational-type leadership for a non-prejudicial exchange of knowledge and collaborative learning.

As humans we are essentially relational beings. What we do, why we do it and what we might achieve at times of economic and social transition are, at least in part, explained by the features and qualities of our relationships with one another (Drath, 2001; Gergen, 2009; Uhl-Bien and Ospina,

2012; Raelin, 2016). This paper complements economic geography and lego-institutional explanations of trade and transactional business and nation state interactions across Europe by contributing a relational account of the possibilities and limits of collaborative working across the sub-national scale. We present and discuss findings from original data from interviews (and informal discussions) with senior level political and executive leaders in two regions in England are directly involved in post-BREXIT related forward planning, and supplement this with interview data from Whitehall, Brussels and continental European local authority representatives. We conclude that pan-Europeanising dialogic approaches to leading at the sub-national scale will be better suited to transcending problematic legacies of BREXIT.

Key Words: Relational Leadership, City & Regional Development, Brexit