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*The New Economy and Uneven Geographical Development:  
Towards a More Holistic Framework for Economic  
Geography*

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## **Abstract**

The central argument of this paper is that current tendencies in the new economic geographies and work on regeneration are not contributing as much as they might to understanding the consequences of current economic change for regional inequality and development. These perspectives have tended to focus on the minutia of change; either the linkages between firms in economic clusters or on the processes of discursive inclusion in regeneration schemes. The wider consequences in terms of the well-being of people in places have been rather neglected. To overcome the partial nature of the approaches criticised a more holistic framework for understanding regional development, which draws upon contemporary economic and social theories in relation to production, social reproduction, recognition and redistribution is advocated.

## **Key words**

**Economic geography, regional development, inequality, participation, recognition, redistribution**

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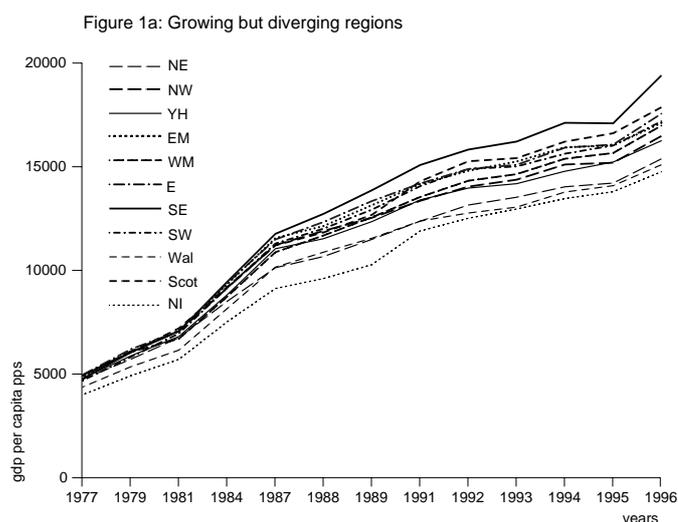
## **About the Author**

Diane Perrons is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environment and an Associate Fellow of the Gender Institute at the London School of Economics. She is Associate Editor of *Regional Studies* and a member of the Women's Budget Group. She recently co-ordinated a comparative study of flexible working and the reconciliation of work and family life for the European Union and is currently working on the gendered nature and spatial form of the new economy.

## Introduction

The new economy is a concept that is widely used but with varied meanings. It is used to depict the new knowledge based 'e' economy (Castells, 2000) and the polarised and more precarious forms of work or, as Beck (2000) would have it, the 'Brave new World of Work' associated with globalisation and deregulation<sup>1</sup>. This paper<sup>2</sup>, focuses on the latter dimensions and their implications for theorising and explaining regional development in Britain, issues that are under explored in the new economic geographies.

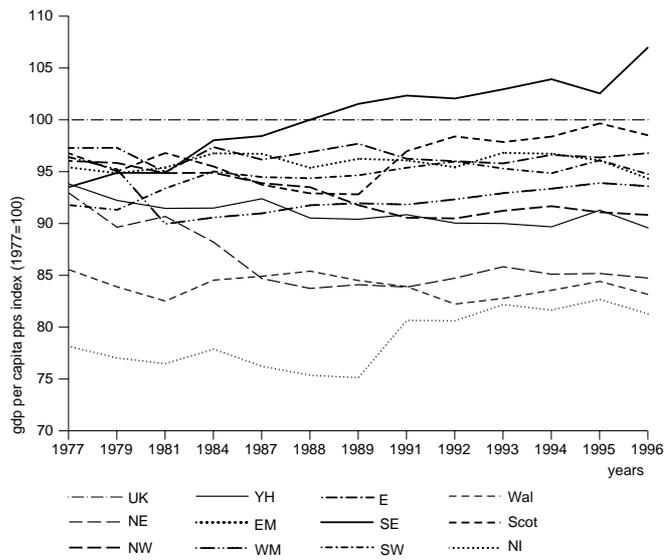
Britain is a divided society. Income inequalities have been increasing and a third of children currently grow up in poverty (DSS, 1999). There are intense pockets of poverty in the South East, and pockets of affluence in the Northern regions (Blair cited by Watt and Hetherington, 1999) but the north-south divide remains and is if anything widening (see Figures 1a and 1b). The government is committed to sharing national prosperity (HM, Treasury 2000) and economists are beginning to recognise the uneven geographical nature of development, albeit in rather perverse ways (see for example Gallup, Sachs and Mellinger, 1999; and Schoenberger, 2000 for a discussion). Yet, two of the main tendencies in economic geography have retreated from analysing uneven development.



Source: Drawn from Eurostat 2000

<sup>1</sup> These different understandings are however connected as the 'e' economy consists of both highly paid self programmable knowledge workers (Castells, 2000) largely in producer services, and low cost generic labour in the personal care services.

Figure 1b: Converging and diverging regions



Source: Drawn from Eurostat 2000

NB: Figures for SE exclude London, so the extent of regional inequality is underemphasised

Contemporary work in the new economic geographies has been concerned with analysing the formation of clusters and systems of relationships between firms, and the work on regeneration has focused on questions of governance and capacity building. Neither approach emphasises how the outcomes of this knowledge, connectedness or inclusion affect the material well being of the areas and the people living there. While the politics of recognition and inclusion redress elitism in the decision making process, recognising the excluded is unlikely to overturn or even identify the processes generating the profound material inequalities prevalent in contemporary British society. These inequalities are being addressed in the social policy literature (see for example Hills, 1998) but remain largely absent from contemporary economic geography, with some notable exceptions (Dunford, 1996 and Dunford and Smith, 2000; Allen, Massey and Cochrane, 1998; Beynon, Hudson and Sadler, 1994). My argument is that analysis of polarisation and uneven development need to be put back at the centre of the research agenda if economic geographers are to contribute effectively to contemporary policy debates on inequality.

This paper divides into five sections. The first, reviews contemporary changes in the organisation and distribution of work, a neglected issue in current regional theorising.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is the first of a series of three, the other two papers deal with the spatial form of and

The second discusses how the nature of work in the new economy contributes to uneven development and inequality. The third, provides a brief account of the two 'New Economic Geographies', which, in different ways, aim to explain the formation of economic clusters but, without linking their presence to material well being in the areas where they are located. Section Four, considers the work on regeneration which has emphasised decision-making processes and new forms of discursive inclusion, but rather neglected the effects of inclusion on material outcomes. Section Five, concludes by suggesting that a more holistic framework which allows the interconnectedness between production, reproduction and its uneven distribution to be conceptualised, would provide a more satisfactory foundation for analysing and understanding contemporary inequalities and the spatial form they take.

### **1. Labour market change and uneven distribution of paid and unpaid work.**

Times are changing. A new economy has emerged, characterised by globalisation, the increasing use of computing and information technologies, employment polarisation, feminisation and new patterns of working. There have also been changes in household structures with only a minority now consisting of a male worker and female homemaker owing to women's increased participation in the labour market and the rising rates of divorce and separation (see Perrons, 2000a). The employment trends take different forms in different countries and this section focuses mainly on those taking place in the UK, which are central to the understanding of uneven development and social reproduction at the regional level.

Compared to other EU member states, the UK labour market appears to be in a relatively favourable situation with employment rising and unemployment falling for women and men. However, this apparently favourable situation at the aggregate level disguises problems arising from the qualitative nature of new forms of work and its uneven distribution, which tend to perpetuate regional inequality and lead to social polarisation within the more developed regions.

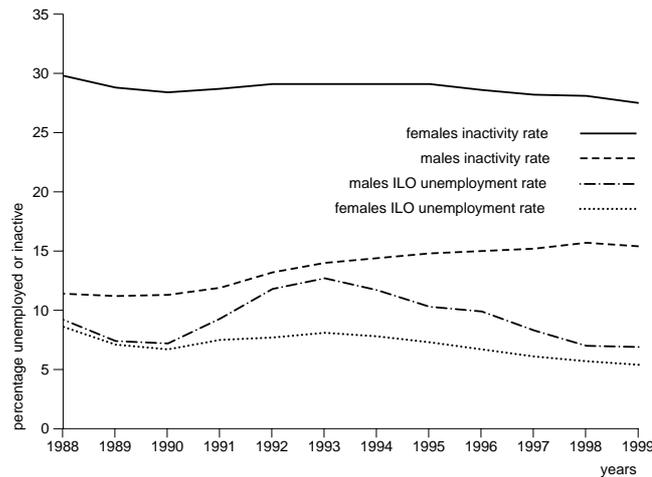
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women's place in the new economy, defined in a way that includes both high and low level work.

(i) *Gender distribution of employment and unemployment*

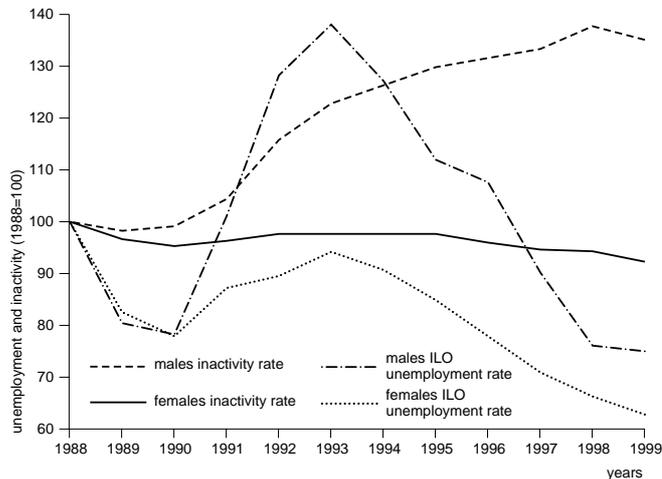
Male unemployment has been falling, especially since 1993, but male labour market inactivity, although significantly lower than female inactivity, continued to rise until 1998 (Figures 2a and 2b). 2.3 million men of working age, excluding students are currently economically inactive compared to only 400,000 in 1979 (Dickens et al 2000).

Figure 2a: Unemployment and labour market inactivity in the UK



Source: ONS, 2000

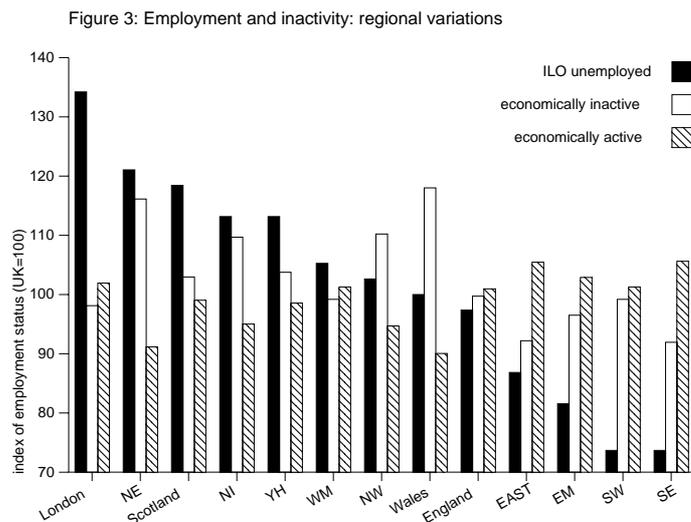
Figure 2b: Unemployment and labour market inactivity in the UK



Source: ONS, 2000

One explanation for these trends is that the majority of jobs in the 'new economy' are stereotypically female with characteristically female hours and levels of pay which are unattractive to those seeking a living wage. Since 1988 the number of women in employment has risen by nearly 1m, (586,000 part-time and 360,000 full-time,

representing increases of 13% and 6% respectively<sup>3</sup>). For men the equivalent figure is only 71,000, made up of a fall of full-time, and an increase in part-time jobs (see Thair and Risdon, 1999). Women now make up 44% of all workers compared to 42% in 1988. The distribution of unemployment and inactivity is also geographically uneven, being far higher in the traditionally less developed regions together with London (see Figure 3) and in Wales and the North West labour market inactivity is comparatively more serious than unemployment



Source: Drawn from ONS, 2000

## (ii) *Overwork and worklessness*

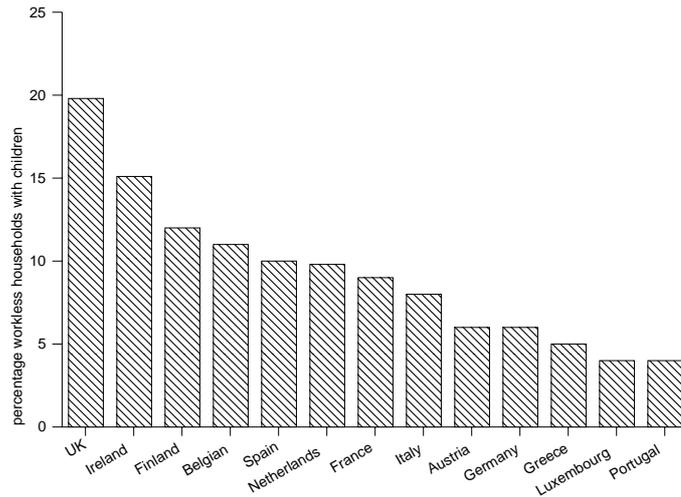
Overall, over 25% of the UK workforce worked more hours than permitted under the EU Working Time Directive, one reason being employment insecurity (Kodz et al, 1998). This work is concentrated amongst prime age workers, and parents - a third of fathers worked over 50 and a smaller proportion of mothers, varying with qualifications<sup>4</sup> and the age of the youngest child, over 40 hours a week (Harkness, 1999). While some families are working very long hours, especially when domestic work is added on, others have been denied paid employment leading to a growing polarisation between workless and dual earner households. Comparing across ten European countries, the UK had the highest proportion of households (with at least

<sup>3</sup> Further, of the predicted increase of 1.7 million jobs in the next decade 1.3m are expected to be taken up by women (Jay 2000).

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the case of mothers with pre-school aged children, only 27% of the unqualified were in employment compared to 76% of the highly qualified (Thair and Risdon, 1999).

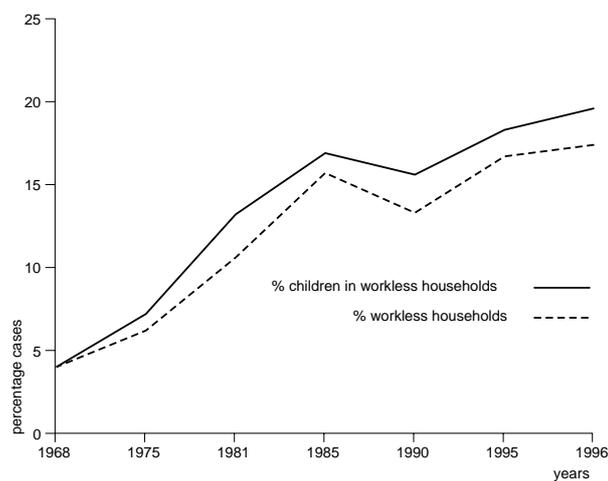
one adult of working age) where all adults were in paid work. This figure expanded from 53.9 to 62.1% between 1983 and 1994 (Gregg, Hansen and Wadsworth, 1999). The UK also had the highest proportion of workless households with children (which increased from 4% in 1968 to 17.4% in 1996 making just over 1 in 6 of all households) see Figures 4a and 4b) (Dickens et al., 2000).

Figure 4a: Workless households with children in Europe, 1998



Source: Dickens, Gregg and Wadsworth, 2000

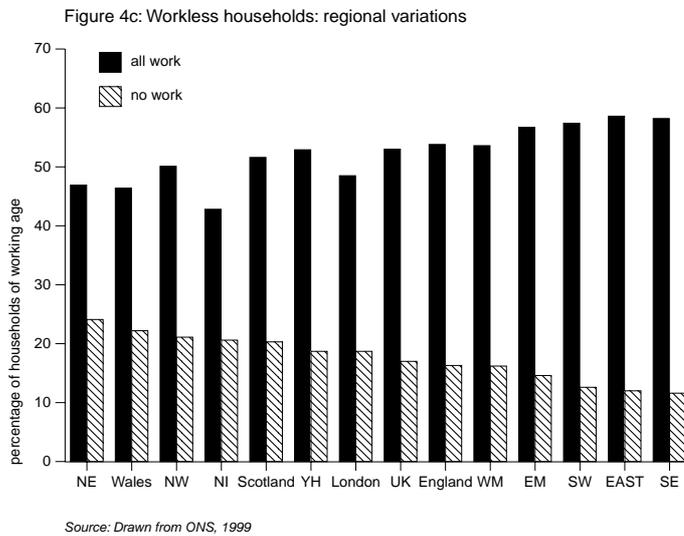
Figure 4b: Workless households in the UK



Source: Dickens, Gregg and Wadsworth, 2000

Workless households contain 4 million adults and 2.6 million children (1 in 5 children) and 90% of these households are poor (Dickens et al., 2000). The distribution of workless households also shows marked regional disparities, with the

highest level being recorded in the North East and lowest in the South East (see Figure 4c).



Work rich households are not necessarily affluent however, as many women enter the labour market as part of a household survival strategy (see Jarvis, 1997) in the context of falling real male wages at the lower end of the earnings distribution. Between 1979 and 1996 income and wage inequalities have increased- while average income increased by 44% the income of the lowest decile fell by 9% and that of the top decile increased by 70%<sup>5</sup>.

Overall one in three children lived in households with below half average income, (i.e. in official poverty) in 1996 compared with one in ten in 1979 (DSS 1999). 19% of children were in low income households, (and 32% in workless households) (HM Treasury, 1999) indicating that the nature of and rewards for work need to be considered as work alone is not necessarily a solution to poverty households in the mid-1990s. The percentage of lone parents living in poverty also dramatically increased from only 19% in 1979 to 63% by 1996 (DSS 1999). The New Deal for Lone Parents (DSS, 1998 and DfEE, various) together with the National Childcare

<sup>5</sup> Machin (1999) estimated that wage dispersion increased by 30% for males and 27% for females between 1979 and 1990 and continued to increase for males in the 1990s but fell slightly for females.

Strategy (HMSO, 1998) and the Working Families Tax credit (WFTC)<sup>6</sup> are designed to increase employment amongst lone parents and low income families by increasing the effective returns from paidwork. However, the equity implications of raising the social contribution from lone parents, given their existing share of reproductive work, from subsidising low pay rather than insisting that living wages be paid need careful consideration (see Perrons, 2000b). Furthermore, these policies tend to presume that jobs are widely available, yet the regional distribution of worklessness suggest that finding work is easier in some localities than others (see Turok and Webster, 1998: Peck, 1999 and Figure 4c).

(iii) *Social exclusion, and the regional concentration of unemployment and poverty.*

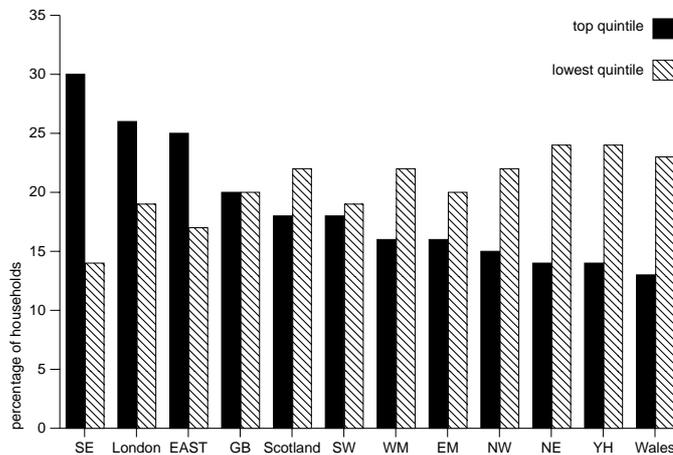
There is also concern about the uneven distribution of unemployment. Ethnic minorities, especially Asian and Black men, are over represented among the unemployed and there are small geographical areas where unemployment and poverty are particularly intense. These areas are found in inner London and the former mining and inner urban areas of the industrial regions of Northern Britain (see Figure 3 and 4c). These areas suffer from additional problems such as low educational achievements and higher rates of mortality and morbidity. The New Deal for Communities has been designed to address this situation (SEU, 1998) but so far this has only been implemented in a few areas.

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<sup>6</sup> This is scheduled to be replaced by the (to be replaced by the Integrated Childcare credit ICC and the Employment Tax Credit ETC in 2002 or 2003).

Some communities in Inner London experience extreme deprivation and areas of affluence exist in Northern England, such as parts of Chester and Leeds, but overall deprivation is higher in Northern Regions, Wales and in Northern Ireland (see Figure 5) which also provides an indication of social polarisation in London.

Figure 5: Regional variations in income inequality

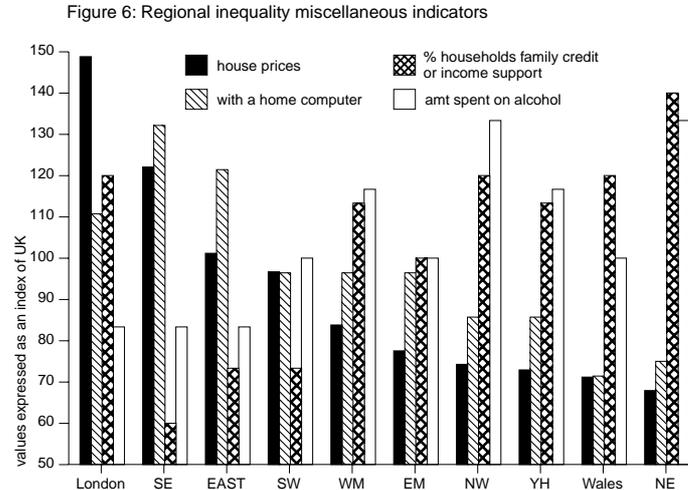


Source: Drawn from ONS, 1999

NB: The figures relate to the percentage of households in the regions that are in the highest and lowest quintiles of the national income distribution.

Regional imbalance is reflected in population movements from north to south with one quarter of a million people moving away from the old industrial communities in the North. Correspondingly the South East has experienced above average population growth of 4.2% (the rate for England and Wales being 2.6%) while the North East has had a net loss of -0.5%. At the sub regional scale gains and losses have been more dramatic with Milton Keynes expanding by 13.4% while Redcar and Easington have declined by 5.5% and 5.7% respectively (ONS, 1999b). These population movements are both a consequence and a cause of the rapid expansion taking place in the South while the Northern regions experience slower rates of growth, albeit not uniformly.

Thus, the traditional indicators of regional inequality - gdp per capita (see Figure 1) unemployment and inactivity (Figure 3), income inequality (Figure 5) and consumption patterns and house prices (Figure 6), reflect continuing regional imbalance.



Source: ONS, 1999  
 NB: House prices expressed as index of England and Wales. Family credit as index of Great Britain

The regional problem therefore remains yet some of the 'leading-edge' work in economic geography focuses either on the formation of spatial clusters or on mapping policy processes. These studies may aid understanding of the minutia of change but leave the central question of the determination of uneven development and inequality unanswered. Without a more holistic framework these studies remain partial in marked contrast to earlier studies of regional development (see for example Massey, 1979 and 1995), or more contemporary ones such as Hudson (2000). Furthermore, there are studies, (for example Allen, Massey and Cochrane, 1998 and Harvey, 2000a), similarly under referenced in the new economic geographies, in which uneven development remains a central research question and the changing organisation and distribution of work, a key part of the explanation.

## 2. Paid work in the 'new economy' and regional development.

### (i) New forms of work

Between 1979-97, there was an explicit attempt to deregulate the labour market and to privatise or introduce market relations in to the public sector as well as a continuing restructuring of the economy from manufacturing to services. Many of the regular relatively well-paid jobs in manufacturing disappeared especially in the North and

West of the UK (see Beynon, Sadler and Hudson, 1994; Hudson, 2000). The vast majority of coal mines have closed, in a few instances they have been converted into museums or heritage centres but neither the scale of employment nor the pay offered are equivalent to those of jobs lost. Many of the employment changes in the 1990s have built upon and reinforced earlier processes of restructuring (Hudson, 1980 and 1988; Martin, 1988; Massey, 1979, 1983 and 1995). The structural coherence of these regions has been undermined and many people became and have become 'structurally irrelevant' (Castells 1996) in part explaining the high proportion of workless households in these areas. Consequently people have sought work outside the regions, become unemployed or labour market inactive or left the area altogether (see Beatty and Fothergill, 1998).

There is also a sense in which many of the new jobs are demeaning, not requiring stereotypically masculine skills (White, 1999; and Massey, 1995 for similar remarks about the restructuring of the late 1970s). Furthermore, the extent to which these jobs can form the basis of an accumulation strategy within the region is debatable (see Hudson, 2000). Tourism for example is subject to intense international competition and the jobs therefore are highly susceptible to rapid changes in consumer taste. Similar problems relate to call centres, one of the fastest growing field of employment within developed and the less developed regions. Work here is usually permanent but highly fragmented, routine and scripted, with limited job hierarchies (Ferne, 1997; Belt et al., 1999; Datamonitor, 1998; Mital Research, 1998) and thus provides little cause for optimism in terms of overcoming regional inequality.

In many ways, call centres represent a contemporary illustration of Stephen Hymer's (1972) Level 111 activities, i.e. the lowest level of the firm's vertical division of labour which, when divided geographically, leads to and reinforces territorially uneven development (see also Massey, 1979). In call centres however, the division of labour has sometimes gone further by fragmenting the activities beyond the firm, which makes internal progression within companies even more difficult. For example, Response Handling Ltd established a new call centre in Govan, Scotland an area previously characterised by shipbuilding. Employees will deal with calls for four different companies: BskyB, Beck's Beer, Scottish Enterprise, and Scottish Power, and will have no other connection with the companies, whose calls they are servicing

(Rapid Response, 1998). In the case of the North East the majority of the call centres are also externally controlled (Belt et al., 2000).

Local Economic Development Agencies tend to disregard these limitations in their concern to attract employment and even advertise the prevailing low levels of pay in order to do so (Estates Gazette, 1998). More significantly, in the context of this paper, these and other limitations, such as the fact that call centre jobs are not usually net additions to the economy,<sup>7</sup> may also be overlooked in perspectives which focus on the competitiveness of individual regions, inter-firm and firm-agency relations rather than on relations between firms, regions and people. To obtain a deeper understanding of regional well being it is important to move beyond the analysis of firms and consider how the quantity and quality of employment offered link with existing practices of social reproduction within local labour markets (see Jonas, 1996) and within households. However in order to understand and not merely describe new employment patterns it is also necessary to theorise the underlying economic, social, political and spatial processes generating employment change.

*(ii) Theories of labour market change*

Ulrich Beck's (1992) analysis of the risk society encapsulates many aspects of the contemporary labour market in the UK and his concept of individualisation provides insight into contemporary labour market policies<sup>8</sup>. Beck (1992) argues that the present era is characterised by organisational fragmentation, individualised and insecure employment contracts and geographical mobility. People will therefore move in and out of employment and experience periods of full and part-time work but with these hazards there will also be new opportunities. Contemporary risks and opportunities are said to be individualised in contrast to the previous era (modern industrial society) when the fortunes of groups of people (classes, sectors or regions) rose or fell together in synergy with the cyclical crises endemic to industrial capitalism. Indeed contemporary inequalities are said to be more hazardous because 'social crises are ascribed to individual failings or psychotic disorder...problems of the system are lessened politically and transformed into personal failure' Beck (1992: 89). This

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<sup>7</sup> For example in retail banking where the existence of a new call centre may mean that branches are closed elsewhere Belt et al (2000).

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller discussion see Perrons, 2000c

analysis resonates strongly with the current UK labour market and labour market policies, which rest on resolving unemployment by raising the employability of the unemployed. However, many of these policies are limited precisely because the fortunes of regions, albeit with internal differentiation, remain structured by their past histories as well as by the continuing uneven nature of capitalist development. So there are important regional differences in the distribution of employment (see Turok and Webster, 1998; Peck, 1999) and relatedly in the distribution of risks and opportunities in social well-being.

Thus the risk society in Beck's analysis is under spatialised and insufficient attention is given to how these patterns of individualisation, risk and insecurity develop differently in different localities, regions and nation states. In turn, these different areas are structured differently by their role in the global division of labour, by different national welfare regimes and by the specific characteristics of the localities in question<sup>9</sup>. Beck's (1992) analysis is thus implicitly universal and, in contrast to the French regulation school, (which does recognise different pathways of development within capitalism, in part structured by the different modes of regulation) provides more of an empirical categorisation than a theory of change. But this deficiency is not remedied where one might expect, in the work of the new economic geographies. Their object of analysis has moved away from analysing regions, cities and localities and has instead focused on articulating sets of interconnections between the actors and agencies involved in establishing either new economic activities or regeneration strategies. Literature, which does focus on changes in work organisation using ideas from Beck (1992) for example Allen and Henry (1997) and Ekinsmith (1999) while fascinating in itself, tends not to explore the implications for the fortunes of the areas where the work and /or the workers are located. In particular links between activities related to production and spatial reproduction remain under explored, although see Massey (1996) for an exception in this respect. In short, within the new economic geography, the geography has tended to take second place to either the economics or the politics. This neglect of geography by geographers is troubling especially as economists seeking to explain uneven spatial development now refer to geography but unfortunately have not moved much beyond the geography of Kant, and Foucault (see

Harvey, 2000b). Below some of the limitations of new economic geography in this respect are considered but see Schoenberger (2000) for a discussion of economists limited understanding of geography and Gallop, Sachs and Mellinger (1999) for an example of such limited understanding).

### **3. The New Economic Geographies and Regional Development**

#### *(i) NEG 1 and NEG 11 - the new economic geographies*

There are two distinctive claims to the 'new economic geography' (NEG): NEG 1, associated with the work of Krugman (1998) (see Martin, 1999 for an extensive review of Krugman's work in this area; see also IRSR 1999 for a collection) and NEG 11 associated with the 'cultural turn' and the work of people such as Amin and Thrift (1994), Storper (1995) and Scott (1998). These two approaches are distinctive but have important similarities. In each case the origins of economic development are considered less interesting than the mechanisms leading to cumulative development and both recognise the importance of path dependency or lock in (QWERTY<sup>10</sup>). Both also focus on the behaviour of firms and are concerned with explaining the geographical clustering of economic activity. In NEG 1, Krugman (1998) aims to articulate the relationship between centripetal (market size, linkages, thick labour markets and pure external economies (e.g. knowledge spillovers)) and centrifugal forces (immobile factors (e.g. labour), land rents and pure external diseconomies (e.g. congestion)). NEG 11, by contrast, emphasises the relational, social and contextual aspects of economic behaviour, the importance of networks and knowledge transfer and specifically the relationship between spatially dependent transaction costs and external economies of scale (Scott, 1998). NEG 1 recognises the importance of 'knowledge spillovers' but these are considered intangible, and emphasis is therefore placed on the measurable relations between economies of scale and transport costs in order to be able to develop and estimate formal models. In the words of Krugman:

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<sup>9</sup> Some of these differences are recognised more in Beck (2000) but even so differentiation within Europe is not emphasised.

<sup>10</sup> QWERTY are the first six letters on the top line of the keyboard, designed for technical efficiency in the days of mechanical typewriters. This technical constraint does not apply to electronic keyboards but this pattern was retained because of the retraining costs that would otherwise be incurred i.e. it is a classic case of a lock in.

'New Economic Geography ... might best be described as a genre: a style of economic analysis which tries to explain the spatial structure of the economy using certain technical tricks to produce models in which there are increasing returns and markets are characterised by imperfect competition' (Krugman, 1998: 164)

By contrast, it is precisely the issues considered intangible by NEG 1 that forms the substance of NEG 11. Emphasis is placed on 'soft' factors or processes leading to the formation of institutional capacity or institutional thickness and on the role of untraded interdependencies (Storper, 1995) in accounting for the development of dynamic spatial clusters. In particular, emphasis is placed in on the importance of knowledge and learning in the region (Amin and Wilkinson, 1999; Maskell and Malmberg, 1999; Morgan, 1997). This learning or knowledge formation is said to take place more effectively at the regional level and in the context of globalisation, regions are said to represent the effective spatial scale for contemporary dynamic development. The regions that gain will be those able to 'engage constructively with the newly emerging global networks to build learning frameworks as the basis for creating local advantages' (Amin and Thrift 1997, Amin, 1999). Scott (1998) for example, explains the paradox of the continuing importance of spatial clustering or regional motors in the global economy through the combination of externalities and high transaction costs together with the real low costs of transporting goods. This combination of factors leads to the existence of locational constraints within an increasingly globalised economy - or in Markusen's (1996) words to 'sticky places in slippery spaces'. Thus regional motors will emerge where 'there are transaction intensive and labour intensive production sectors with high endogenous levels of entrepreneurial and innovative energy ' (Scott, 1998: 63). Indeed Scott combines elements of the two new economic geographies. He argues that 'a strictly economic logic of production will take us only so far in understanding industrial organisational processes.... [T]ransactional systems are always and of necessity embedded in historically determinate social conditions' (Scott, 1998: 78). However, the form of analysis differs between the two approaches. NEG 1 is characterised by sophisticated spatial model building and NEG 2 (or the 'new regionalism' (Lovering, 1999)) by a more descriptive analysis of the complex social interrelations and processes of knowledge transfers between agencies within regions.

*(ii) Limitations of the new economic geographies for understanding regional development*

Despite differences in form and substance there are important similarities between the NEG's, which limit their contribution to the analysis of regional development. Most significantly, the focus on the firm as the unit of analysis leads to analyses of spatial clusters or with developments within regions rather than the development of the region as a whole (Sayer, 1982). This focus limits discussion of the national context, especially the system of macro economic regulation (Lovering, 1999) and the prevailing welfare regime (Esping Andersen, 1990, 1999), both of which profoundly shape the way similar processes of restructuring at the global level take different forms in real geographical places. This omission is crucial for a number of reasons. First it tends to reinforce the hegemony of the dominant discourse, i.e. that 'global processes' are inevitable and that there really is 'no alternative' (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999) and so little point in even formulating alternative scenarios. Second, it perhaps inadvertently encourages research that focuses on similarities, and identifying the ideal criteria for establishing learning and connectedness. As a consequence the ways in which state institutions could mediate 'global processes' differently to produce more egalitarian and inclusive outcomes, albeit within a capitalist framework, tend to be overlooked. Furthermore, developments within firms, especially new working practices associated with insecurity and risk (discussed above) (Beck, 1992; see also Sennett, 1998) are left outside the analysis. Yet, these labour processes profoundly shape peoples' incomes and opportunities and hence overall material well being in particular regions and localities. Thus, the firm, a central plank of analysis in the NEG's, is like a black box, but without the flight recorder. In Marx's terms, it is a 'chaotic conception' (Marx, 1973: 100) and processes central to the development of the region and uneven development between regions are absent from the research agenda. Finally, questions of reproduction in the immediate sense of the social division of labour between different kinds of paid work and between paid work and caring, and in the wider sense of the sustainable regional development are rarely discussed. Yet, these dimensions are central to understanding the well being of people within regions and so to regional or spatial development as a whole.

These omissions also have important policy implications. A narrow focus on the firm leads directly to policies to attract firms rather than carefully evaluating different policy options. Attracting firms to and linking firms within the regions is regarded as the hallmark of a successful learning or networked region and there is little evaluation of outcomes for the region as a whole. Positive development effects from inward investment and assistance to small and medium sized enterprises have been assumed rather than evaluated and contrasted with alternative ways of using state funds such as redistributive tax policies or investment in the public sector. For example, it has been estimated that 'the cost of bringing everyone up to the current level of half average income is about one per cent of GDP' (Howarth et al., 1999) which could be achieved via changes in the tax benefit system. In the case of Wales, Lovering (1999) points out that more employment has been created within the public sector than via inward investment.

Thus although both NEG's provide valuable insights into the formation of spatial clusters, in terms of analysing regional development they remain partial. Similarly, in a related area of economic geography that focuses on institutional mechanisms and governance, key questions have also been marginalised. This time the marginalisation derives from the emphasis given to mapping policy processes. The prior questions as to whether the ways in which the mechanisms through which regeneration policies evolve and are delivered significantly effect policy outcomes is insufficiently explored.

#### **4 Recognition and governance in urban and regional planning**

##### *(i) Recognition through participation - in principle*

As discussions of participation and inclusion abound, traditional means of empowerment and representation through trade unions and local authorities have weakened owing to new working contracts, the centralisation of local authority expenditure and the growth of quangos<sup>11</sup>. New agencies and partnerships are established to reintroduce some degree of local representation, such participation or apparent participation often being a pre-condition for national and supra national

funding. Residents, employees, businesses, consumers are recognised and given a voice. Indeed the new politics is all about, recognition, participation and involvement perhaps displacing questions of power differences and economic redistribution<sup>12</sup> in academic work as well as in practical planning matters (see Fraser, 1996).

This interest in diversity and recognition derives largely from the postmodern critique of political economy, which, in the planning context, is said to be preoccupied 'with the distribution of material resources' (Healey, 1996: 219) and has 'little to say about the fine grain of economic and social relations [and] the diversity of ways of using and valuing places' (Healey, 1996: 218). To redress these apparent deficiencies Healey (1996, 1998) draws upon ideas of governance structures from NEG 11 and attempts to operationalise Habermas's (1998) ideas about consensus building through inclusive argumentation (Healey, 1998). She argues that involving 'stakeholders' in the planning process will effect more inclusive outcomes and correspondingly, the role of urban planning should therefore be to foster the 'institutional capacity' necessary for this inclusion (Healey, 1998:1544) and so:

'develop normative principles which *we* might use to judge *our* decisions and to build interrelations across *our* differences which will enable *us* to undertake strategic consensus building work through which to create interculturally sensitive strategies for managing *our* common concerns in urban region space' (Healey, 1996: 219) (my emphasis).

Paradoxically having recognised diversity, common interests are assumed to emerge rather unproblematically through inter subjective 'communicative practices' in which *we* are said to be 'deeply skilled' (Healey, 1996: 219).

In contrast to the atomistic decision-making assumed by economists, Healey, following Habermas, argues that it is through everyday 'dialogical constructions' that we establish our identities, preferences, and beliefs (Healey 1996: 219). These ideas

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<sup>11</sup> See Ward (2000) and Imrie and Raco (1999) for a discussion of the extent of change in urban governance.

<sup>12</sup> Storper (1998: 245) points out in the case of the US that the program of empowerment zones is 'all dressed up in the ideology of bottom up community led development - but its structure is fundamentally defined by the withdrawal of the Federal Government from an active role in urban matters and the whole programme

about inter-subjective communication are then translated into the planning arena where consensus is assumed to be possible provided the appropriate mechanisms for democratic discussion and inclusion are established. Even if appropriate mechanisms were in place however, it does not follow that discussion takes place in this way, that 'we are deeply skilled in communicative practices for listening, learning and understanding each other' (Healey, 1996: 219) or that if we are, these practices hold for all kinds of dialogue. Indeed, as Flyvbjerg (1998: 192) points out Habermas is only really interested in establishing constitutional forms and so provides a 'discourse about discourse ethics'. However, for consensus to emerge, even at the discursive level, Habermas (1998) specified certain procedural rules, in particular that power differences be neutralised, and these conditions simply do not hold within the planning arena. It is very difficult to imagine in practice that 'the power of the better argument can confront and transform the power of the state and capital' (Healey, 1996: 219 referring to Habermas). That is, it might be possible to achieve a discursive resolution through 'inclusionary argumentation' but when decisions are effected materially, particularist demands are likely to re emerge (see Jessop, 1990).

Furthermore, planners too are socially embedded and not immune from material social relations. So it is not clear how they would be able to act neutrally to articulate choices from the discussions and even were they to do so how they would then have the power to enact the outcomes in unconstrained ways. Although planning may be an exercise in imagining the future, many of the dreams of planners are imperfectly realised, even in relatively small scale schemes (see the section below and Flyvbjerg (1998) for the case of the Aalborg bus shelter). As Abu-Lughod (1998) argues to focus only on associative forms is to give too much attention to form and insufficient attention to content. She illustrates this argument by reference to two contrasting associations - Banana Kelly in the South Bronx and East Village in Lower Manhattan. And argues that although the associative structure of the first was probably more inclusive, its capacity for action was greatly assisted by its 'undesirable' location, which 'protected it from becoming a contested object of real estate desire' (Abu-Lughod, 1998: 235).

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does little to restore the Reagan era cutback of 2/3rds of the federal funding for urban

Recognising cultural diversity and looking at ways of analysing problems and designing solutions in inclusionary ways is clearly a necessary condition for moving towards a society freer from domination and status subordination (Fraser, 2000). However, two problems remain. First, perhaps not all differences are equally valid<sup>13</sup> and second, discursive inclusion will not be sufficient to overcome material exclusion. Recent discussions in feminist theory have questioned whether all differences and interests have equally valid claims and suggested that some differences, in particular economic inequalities, matter more than others (see Phillips, 1997 and 1999). These arguments have not been addressed adequately in the regeneration literature, which emphasises mechanisms for discursive inclusion rather than recognising that 'giving voice also means allowing claims on real resources' (Forester, 1998:214) and thinking about how this might be achieved. That is, the analysis tends to stop with the identification and discussion of procedures (see for example Edwards and Woods 2000; Jones and Meegan, 2000; Lloyd, Meegan and Ni Laiore, 2000). To obtain socially inclusive outcomes, mechanisms for neutralising power differences in decisions about and mechanisms for resource distribution will be required. Furthermore, it is also important to recognise that planners, as professionals, do have knowledge and skills that could be harnessed to effect more desirable outcomes<sup>14</sup>.

In order to effect an 'approved set of collective social outcomes' (Storper 1998) it may be more effective to start from some agreed normative criteria or social rules rather than build from the perceived interests of individual stakeholders. Accountable professionals and technicians could then use their professional expertise to outline alternative scenarios, which approximate these criteria in different ways. Without

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policy.'

<sup>13</sup> As Forester argues it is easy to articulate 'the practical ethics of listening or recognition' but if giving voice is to mean anything it means 'making real claims on others' (Forester, 1998: 224 and 214). Yet some voices can be self serving and oppressive and thus must be critically evaluated and it is not at all clear that this can be done simply through discussion. Ways have to be found of transforming 'diverse and plural voices into democratic action (Forester, 1998: 224).

<sup>14</sup> Making an analogy with the medical world, contributing to discussions about the overall allocation of resources should in my view be part of being a citizen, but the implementation of the decisions requires specialist knowledge.

some accepted normative criteria (see Fraser, 1996: 45 for seven normative criteria for gender equity and Harvey, 2000a: 248-252 for a discussion of universal rights related to planning issues) implementation of decisions reached by ad hoc local groups could lead to a whole range of inconsistent outcomes with no agreed ways of choosing between them. Furthermore, local schemes may be viable in themselves but undermined by other local schemes, state policies operating at different spatial scales or by the decisions of local or global private entrepreneurs.

Given the complex and interdependent nature of urban areas, atomistic decision making through the market has long been demonstrated to lead to collective irrationality owing to market imperfections, including the temporal myopia of individual decision making (Scott 1980). Although some of the externalities and dynamic implications could be identified and articulated by planners it is by no means clear that collectively desirable outcomes, which also recognise the rights of future generations could emerge from the discussions of ad hoc groups and individuals groups any more effectively. Given these difficulties, together with the problems of representation, accountability and community fatigue (see below) a better strategy for creating a more active civil society might be to reinvigorate traditional democratic mechanisms.

Conventional democratic procedures are not perfect, in particular in many cases elected representatives are far from representative in terms of gender, ethnic and age balance. For example in the North East men form 87% of the region's MPs and 77% of its elected councillors of whom only 3.3% of the total were under 35 (Wainwright, 2000 see also Peck and Tickell, 1996). Even so perhaps formal democracy has some advantages over ad hoc local groups. Potentially, all legally resident citizens are included and accountability criteria and mechanisms for dialogue between different levels of government are already in place. Some guarantees and compensation mechanisms could be incorporated to prevent mis-recognition of minorities and address ways in which they can be accorded parity of status in the allocation of public material resources (see Fraser, 2000). The diversity of representatives could be increased via quotas, the success of which has already been demonstrated in relation to gender in the Swedish parliament and, although withdrawn, was probably responsible for the increase in women Labour MPs in the UK. Less optimistically it is

important to recognise that even model formal democracy is unlikely to challenge the wide power imbalances in capitalist society. Nevertheless quite different forms and degrees of spatial, social and material inequality can be found within and between countries. These differences in turn can at least in part be attributed to different political choices and different state practices, especially at the national level.

(ii) *Recognition in urban and regional planning*

Extended community involvement has been particularly promoted in regeneration strategies. Partnerships were designed to give voice to local businesses and the community, to streamline the range of agencies or quangos and to make the delivery of policies more effective (Audit Commission, 1999). However evidence that this degree of involvement is desired, that it is conducive to greater social inclusion except in a formal discursive sense is lacking. Furthermore, the proliferation of agencies and schemes, with varying remits including economic development, job creation, reducing poverty, raising racial integration and obtaining environmental improvements has resulted in project based rather than strategically oriented planning with 'councils developing strategies to attract funds, rather than using the regeneration funds to support strategies' (Brown, 1999: 13). In some areas, a large number of regeneration partnerships have evolved with no obvious mechanisms for reconciling their different agendas, except perhaps even more partnerships. For example in mid-Wales and the English borderlands 257 bodies were identified which claimed to be operating as regeneration partnerships (Edwards et al., forthcoming). Area based strategies have also proliferated - the 31 City Challenges have been superseded by 600 Single Regeneration Budget projects. These schemes will now have to be integrated with the New Deal for Communities and with the new Regional Development Agencies leading to confusion in the overall architecture of urban and regional planning (Parkinson, 1998).

With so many partnerships, there is a danger of partnership fatigue (Healey, 1998), of low levels of community interest and activist 'burnout' (Parkinson, 1998; Duncan and Thomas, 2000). Some authorities keep registers of potential 'volunteers' and the same volunteers participate in many schemes, all of which raises questions of legitimacy and about who and what these partnerships actually represent. (Parkinson, 1998).

Thus extending governance may simultaneously weaken local democracy by prioritising the interests of those who have time or inclination to be involved. As Forester (198:214) suggests there is a risk of 'confusing the self-serving advertising of corporate leaders with the real possibilities of a vibrant civil society'. In some instances, targets and success are defined in terms of integrating the partners and raising institutional capacity. Yet, whether attaining greater community involvement and increased channels of communication actually follow through into material outcomes rests on belief rather than clear evidence (Parkinson, 1998). A study of area based regeneration of four deprived urban areas in England found that the key problems were not those of a lack of social capital or community capacity but one of insufficient material resources and jobs as well as poor links with the wider urban area. The study concluded that many of the problems were those of poverty rather than a lack of social cohesion (Forrest and Kearns, 1999). Similarly, a study of community initiatives in former coalfield areas, representatives stated that they were not 'incapacitated' but needed funds to realise their capacities (Bennett, Hudson and Beynon, 2000). Further, a comparative European study concluded that although other countries lagged behind Britain in terms of designing area-based programmes, their more regulated labour markets and greater support for the welfare state limited the severity of social exclusion in the first instance (Parkinson, 1998). In particular inequality had not increased during the 1990s so they concluded that *'Area-based programmes are valuable ways of addressing the problem of social exclusion once it has emerged. But in responding to social exclusion, the wider comparative lesson is that prevention, rather than cure, is the more intelligent strategy'* (Parkinson, 1998: 4). This conclusion suggests that studies of urban and regeneration need to be set within a broader context including state macro and welfare policies in contrast to the rather myopic tendencies currently prevalent in economic geography.

##### **5) Towards a more holistic approach to regional development**

In order to address the problems of inequality outlined in the first section of the paper a more holistic approach to urban and regional development is required. The focus of analysis needs to be the uneven development between people and between places. Theories of urban and regional development need to recognise the concrete spatial world as a synthesis of many determinations or the outcome of a multiplicity of social dynamics operating at different levels. Although there needs to be a division of

intellectual labour, all the determinations or processes need to be on the agenda so an intellectual space is created for thinking about the connectedness of processes shaping urban and regional change. Possible perspectives for doing so include: - the French Regulation School (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1992) - the Risk Society (Beck, 1992 and 1999) welfare regimes (Esping Andersen, 1990 and 1999) or gendered welfare regimes (Lewis, 1992) historical materialism (Harvey, 2000a) or feminist historical materialism (Pollert, 1996).

French Regulation School perspectives need to pay greater attention to the analysis of the mode of regulation, in particular the comparative analysis of state practices at different spatial scales and to questions of social reproduction including caring and the domestic division of labour. In 'Beckian' analysis individualisation, new forms of flexible and insecure working and family arrangements need to be explored in different national contexts as well as at different spatial scales. Even though tendencies towards insecurity and individualisation are probably universal the nature and pace of change differs between nation states and between different organisations depending on the legislative framework and social and cultural norms leading to different regional and local outcomes<sup>15</sup>. Recognising and understanding these different experiences within capitalism provides a foundation for mapping alternative futures. The welfare regime approach emphasises different state practices at the national level but pays less attention to changes in global capitalism, which has generated homogenising tendencies, making the preservation of nationally differentiated economic and social policies difficult. Disaggregated analyses of sectors, organisations and localities also indicate that common state policies are not experienced uniformly and so this approach also needs to be integrated with others.

None of these three approaches are noted for their awareness of gender and would need to be modified in order to include analysis of reproduction in the sense of the social division of labour between different kinds of paid work and between paid work and caring, both central to understanding the well being of people within particular areas. Nevertheless, they share one advantage over feminist historical materialism, because they have developed sets of intermediary concepts between the political

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<sup>15</sup> But see Beck (2000).

economy of capitalism and contemporary social structures, which provide useful guidelines for empirical research. However, they all also need to be grounded spatially.

Each of the above social theories, with appropriate modifications, potentially provide insights into how general processes of capitalist development are activated by and materialise within particular social and spatial forms. Such detailed comparative analysis is crucial if real 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000a) are to be identified within capitalism. This perspective may be dismissed as the ideas of a 'reformist tinkerer' rather than a utopian visionary (see Harvey, 2000a; Perrons 2000d). However it is probably more realistic, more likely to have positive material outcomes and more consistent with dialectical reasoning, than designing utopian blueprints. At the same time, the broader theoretical context together with the focus on material outcomes for people and places means that it is potentially more radical than studies which foreground detailed relationships between the agents and institutions of capitalist society. In terms of practical policy this approach would also allow a context for 'particularist demands to be juxtaposed, without degenerating into exclusive particularism' (see Storper 1998: 245) and in so doing provide a way forward towards designing more inclusive outcomes.

This prescription is daunting but not impossible because good models already exist within economic geography, even though they are sometimes overlooked by those currently debating the nature and direction of the discipline (see Amin and Thrift 2000 for example, where the conceptualisation of economic geography is quite narrow). Thus I am proposing a return to 'Old' Economic Geography, that is to perspectives which draw upon contemporary social theories but which have people and places as their main subject of inquiry. In this way, geographers, economic and otherwise, may be able to contribute to understanding and proposing resolutions for the growing social and spatial inequalities characteristic of contemporary society <sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Possible starting points would be (Beynon Hudson and Sadler, 1994), (McDowell, 1997) and (Allen, Massey, and Cochrane 1998).

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