UCL

The **Constitution** Unit

Inclusiveness of Regional Chambers

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Foreword

The purpose of this report is to investigate the arrangements made by Regional Chambers to enhance their inclusiveness. Regional Chambers were set up in 1998 and 1999 with a specific requirement that representatives of business, environmental, and voluntary sector interests (amongst others) be fully involved in their proceedings. These groups have since become known as 'social and economic partners' or 'community stakeholders'. Little is known in the wider policy community about how effectively they have been included in the mainstream business of Regional Chambers. This report seeks to begin to rectify this omission.

This research was initiated by the HM Treasury Summer Placement scheme, and took place during July and August 2002. Due to the limited time available two chambers were selected as case-studies: Yorkshire and Humber, and the South East. These chambers were selected due to the difference in the size of their membership (35 in Yorkshire and Humber against 111 in the South East).

Semi-structured interviews with around a dozen respondents in each region formed the basis of the primary research. Respondents were drawn from chamber officers, social and economic partner members, and to a lesser extent from local authority members. The interviews were carried out in the context of a literature review, which attempted to trace the origins and establishment of the concepts of 'partnership' and 'inclusiveness' as they related to regional and local policy-making. The original intention had also been to trace the contribution of partner representatives to policy-making by examining previous committee minutes, but this proved to be an unworkable task: it was not possible to separate out the contribution of partner members from local authority members from written records, and the relative informality of committee proceedings meant that ideas and proposals rarely had clear origins from particular Chamber groupings.

The report is divided into three sections. The first contains the review of literature on local regeneration partnerships, and in that context examines the creation of the Regional Chambers and the involvement of stakeholders in the wider process of devolution. The second and third sections examine the Chamber structures, and experience of inclusion, in the South East and Yorkshire and Humber respectively. The conclusion draws together and evaluates the findings from the two regions.

The explicit requirement on regional chambers to extend their membership to social and economic partners is seen as their most innovative feature. This research seeks to identify how they operate, and with what impact, so that all chambers can consider possible ways of improving stakeholder engagement.

Two months before the research for this report began, the Government published its White Paper on regional government, *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions.* The White Paper requested opinions on only one topic: the question of how to involve social and economic partners in the work of an elected regional assembly. This report does not address

that question directly. The plan for this report had been written before the publication of the White Paper, and was not conceived of as a response to the White Paper. However, it is hoped that its findings will filter in to the policy-making process.

Executive Summary

— The position of the social and economic partners on Regional Chambers has affinities with that of non-local authority members on local regeneration partnerships throughout the 1990s. Though there is no evidence of a direct link between the two, it is clear that similar thinking shaped both types of partnership.

— In both cases, partners from outside local authorities were frequently selected through opaque processes; they were selected sometimes to represent a particular sector and sometimes for their individual qualities; in all cases it was hoped that they would aid delivery of local strategies and bring expert knowledge of potential pitfalls and opportunities to bear on the strategy-making process.

— Partnership in Regional Chambers will take a different form from that at local authority level, as chambers have no executive or funding power: but many similar issues are recognisable.

— Two Regional Chambers were researched for this report: the South East, and Yorkshire and Humber. The former has 111 full members and the latter only 35: the former region has little regional identity whilst the latter's is amongst the strongest in England.

— The South East England Regional Assembly benefited from having no predecessor body, allowing it to fully incorporate partners from the beginning and to become the regional planning body without controversy. The Assembly makes provisions in its constitution for proportionality on committees, between the political groups, social and environmental partners, and economic partners: the latter two are treated as separate groups. Both Chambers studied made a point of not holding all meetings in local government venues and of distinguishing themselves from the regional local government association: symbolically, this emphasises that neither is a local government-driven body.

— Several partner members are elected through umbrella bodies. These groups, formed to exert influence at regional level, are developing electoral colleges within their memberships, growing a limited form of democratic accountability. Environment and voluntary sectors, consisting of many small organisations, tend to lead these developments. There was some concern that business groups, in the South-East especially, were less engaged than they might be.

— Many of these partner members make sophisticated use of ICT to make themselves accountable to their 'sectoral constituencies'; likewise, their 'constituents' transmit views on regional strategies and policies upwards to them via electronic means, and their views can then reach Chamber plenaries or committee meetings.

— A very small staff—of one or two people—can make a disproportionately large contribution to effective use of ICT and to transmission of information, and hence inclusiveness, by the Regional Chambers.

— There was no real evidence that the large size of the South East England Regional Assembly was an advantage in making it more representative. The

impression was that many members were 'dormant', turning up to meetings irregularly and not contributing.

— Relations between individual partner members are fundamental to the transaction of business on Chambers. Both Chambers appear to have a 'core membership', made up of individuals who are able to give considerable time to Chamber business because of the nature of their 'day jobs'. Without these reserves of time Chambers would function far less effectively. Payment of allowances for chairing committees, or for attendance, is very limited.

— The existence of multiple points of access for partner organisations is a feature of both Chambers studied. Each uses groups outside of the plenary Chamber and official committees in order to enhance inclusiveness. In the South East these are 'advisory groups', in Yorkshire and Humber they are 'Commissions'. The groups permit sectors to exercise greater influence over policy discussions which are of particular interest to them: membership is fluid and open to any organisation that can demonstrate an interest.

— Both Chambers were generally satisfied with the contribution of their structures to inclusiveness. Concerns were expressed that greater inclusion of women, black and minority ethnic groups, and the elderly and youth, was required. There was some concern in the South East that business representatives were somewhat semi-detached.

— The funding for Regional Chambers announced by the Government in March 2001 was universally welcomed, and cited as the main means through which Chambers had been able to tackle issues of inclusiveness and increase the capacity of their partner members to contribute to Chamber business.

— Partner members in both regions largely assented that they were treated as equal to local authority members in the Chamber. Many were critical of perceived politicisation and point-scoring by local authority members, but mostly conceded that this had lessened since the Chambers had been set up.

— SEERA's size, with a full membership some three times that of YHA, did not appear to bring any clear benefits for inclusiveness or involvement of partner members. There were some indications that many of SEERA's members were hardly at all involved in the business of the Chamber, making their contribution to inclusiveness and representativeness no more than nominal. More detailed research is needed on this issue.

Introduction

The small amount of available literature on Regional Chambers has focused on studying their development and achievements since their inception in 1998-99. There have been few attempts to explain the rationale behind the particular shape in which they were created. Reasoning behind particular features of the Chambers has tended to grow, unchallenged, out of various government documents produced during that period. There is little evidence of strategic thinking behind this documentation, and hence indications of *why* the Chambers are shaped as they are are elusive.

The title of this report, *Inclusiveness of Regional Chambers*, derives from the unusual dual membership of the chambers. The presence of 'social and economic partners' alongside local government representatives in a notionally democratic body has contributed to a sense that the Chambers are local government driven, with the less familiar grouping of 'social and economic partners' being a secondary group which has been added on to existing structures and processes. Regional Chambers are expected to carry out a representative role, of a kind, at regional level: it is intuitive that, in the absence of direct elections, local government representatives should fulfil this role. But it is less clear why social and economic partners have been granted a seat at the regional table.

The origin of the concept of regional partnership appears to lie with the numerous examples of local regeneration and community-based partnerships since the late 1980s. This report therefore begins by reviewing several reports on the effectiveness of these partnerships. It focuses on how effectively the non-local government partners were included, and what organisational issues arose through efforts to include them. The report then examines the creation of the Regional Chambers in the light of the experiences of regeneration partnerships. In many ways the Regional Chambers are 'standing partnerships', including non-local authority representatives as members for similar reasons to those originally given for inclusion of such people at local level; but they have very different roles from local partnerships, and comparisons can only be drawn to a limited extent.

The literature on local partnerships does not *explain* the shape of Regional Chambers: there is no evidence of a direct causal link between the local partnerships and the decisions made on membership of Regional Chambers. But the concepts of inclusiveness used in the two forms of partnership show close affinity; hence it is valid to examine the aims of local partnerships in an attempt to determine what the initial aims of inclusiveness in Regional Chambers may or could have been, to provide a benchmark by which to judge current practice.

This report does not discuss issues of public participation in Regional Chambers. Stakeholder involvement and public participation clearly overlap, and this is reflected in the literature on local partnerships. But regional stakeholder involvement is not a means to enhancing participation by the public: the Regional Chambers do not target their activities toward individuals but toward organisations. The wide variety of public participation methods

trialled in recent years, such as citizens' juries, public meetings, and use of the Internet for consultation, do not relate to the inclusiveness of partnerships: they are answers to a different question, and are conceptually distinct.

By 2001, all of the Regional Chambers had changed their names to 'Regional Assembly'. In this report they are described collectively as Chambers, to distinguish them from elected regional assemblies, although when a specific one is referred to its formal name is used.

Local partnership working

Local partnerships began as a means of delivering various forms of regeneration to deprived local areas. It was hoped that partnerships would both encourage and stimulate greater community involvement, which would produce plans more in line with community needs—working with people and not doing things to them; and that they would bring on board local businesses and community and voluntary organisations, which would deliver regeneration in a more locally-tailored fashion:

> The aim of such arrangements is to harness the energy, skills and resources of the key actors—such as public authorities, employers, trade unions, voluntary organisations and local community groups—in developing and implementing local regeneration strategies.[1]

Partnerships were conceived of as an alternative to directing resources solely through local authorities. This preference almost certainly links to the loss of confidence in local authorities by central government which occurred during the 1980s. Geddes states that "it is fairly clear that one of government's intentions in promoting partnership has been as a challenge to the role and legitimacy of local politicians."[2]

Conversely, local authorities themselves, following diminution of their powers, had an incentive to build relationships with organisations which could help them achieve their aims. This might include, amongst others, health authorities, the police, and further education colleges, as well as the 'business, environment and community groups' more commonly quoted as partners today. In other words, necessity was the mother of partnership at local level. Partnership was a means through which local authorities could resume co-ordinated policy activity over functions outside their remit: but the price, for local authorities, was a diminution of control and influence. A related motive exists at regional level; Chambers have no executive powers at all, and achieve what influence they have through relationship-building.

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[1] Mike Geddes, *Local Partnership: A Successful Strategy for Social Cohesion?*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1998, p.15. Available at http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF9816EN.pdf

[2] Mike Geddes, "Introduction", in ed. John Benington and Mike Geddes, Local Partnerships and Social Exclusion in the European Union, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 187

Alcock *et al* (1998) argue that there were practical reasons for the popularity of partnerships in the early 1990s. Most pressing was the fact that Government, and European, funding was often made available only to groups of organisations made up of more than merely local authorities. However, co-operation between different authorities was also seen as a good in itself:

> Partnerships encourage co-ordination of activity and policies across organisations. This can reduce duplication of effort. It can also instil synergy as the integrated activities of partners may amount to more than the impacts of each working in relative isolation.[3]

Besides this, Armstrong states that the European Union developed an interest in partnership working in the late 1980s, which aimed "to make the process of economic development more inclusive, more representative of the array of actors involved in economic development…."[4] Regeneration in particular was perceived to be more than just 'government policy' which was 'done to' its recipients; it should be a joint and participative process, and a partnership approach would in turn improve the quality of policy and delivery of policy. Hence inclusiveness was, from the start, as much a practical aim as a 'moral' one.

The European Union added a clause to Structural Fund regulations in 1993 specifying that economic and social partners (primarily businesses and trade unions) should be included in programme delivery. As with regeneration partnerships, there is no evidence of a causal link between EU funding programmes and the creation of the Regional Chambers, and the functions of Regional Chambers are clearly very different from those of local regeneration partnerships. But EU programmes contributed to the mainstreaming of partnership working and its acceptance as the norm. Armstrong *et al* state:

> The establishment of regional partnerships and partnerships between the [structural funds'] implementing authorities…seek to make the process of economic development more inclusive, more representative of the array of actors involved in economic development, and more likely to create effective working partnerships between policy actors.[5]

Armstrong *et al* also claim that a step change took place in interest in consulting the "third sector" (voluntary and community organisations) at the time of the election of the Labour government in 1997. It appears that the change of government was pivotal in applying partnership to general involvement in policy-making, whereas previously it had related only to specific policy programmes. That shift is reflected in the access provided for partners to a wide range of policy areas within Regional Chambers:

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[3] Peter Alcock, Gary Craig, Paul Lawless, Sarah Pearson, David Robinson, *Inclusive Regeneration: Local Authorities' corporate strategies for tackling disadvantage*, Sheffield Hallam University, 1998, p.30

[4] H. Armstrong, P. Wells and J. L. Woolford, *The Role of the Third Sector in the Governance of Regional Policy*, unpublished working paper, 2002, p.4

[5] Ibid., p. 4

> This in-coming government rapidly endorsed the social inclusion agenda and the Third Sector suddenly found itself welcome in debates, discussions and policy formulation across virtually the whole array of government policy-making. . [It] also developed a number of major national policy shifts which directly encouraged a greater role for the Third Sector.[6]

Though, as many reports testify, the involvement of partners in projects has been variable in practice, all of these initiatives contributed to establishing the principle: that, for certain policies, partnership was practically and inherently preferable to government-controlled schemes. When the Labour government came to create voluntary Regional Chambers, the presence of social and economic partners, with a legitimate an interest in regional policy alongside locally-elected politicians, was no longer a foreign concept but a normalised, even fashionable one.

Local Strategic Partnerships

Confidence in the benefits of partnership was at the heart of the concept of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), established in 2000 by the Government. LSPs require local authorities, or groups of local authorities, to set up a partnership board with a number of local partners. LSPs were intended to act as more permanent partnerships in local areas, as a response to the common problem, identified by much literature, of losing goodwill and expertise when partnership funding runs out. After a number of pilot schemes, LSPs were extended to the whole of England in 2002. The Government's guidance on their setup explained the Government's view of their role:

> Effective neighbourhood renewal depends on services working together to plan and deliver concerted improvements in public services. Local people, business and the voluntary sector all need to have opportunities to contribute…. [LSPs] will need to make real efforts to involve people who are traditionally under-represented, such as faith, black and minority ethnic communities…. [Existing partnerships'] membership and structure may need some adjustment, especially to secure involvement from the community, voluntary organisations and business.[7]

The guidance paper makes little reference to why particular sectors would be able to bring leadership or leverage where it did not exist before, or how involvement, in whatever way, of 'community leaders' would lead to better results. It appears that these assertions have by now become 'accepted wisdom', and have transferred themselves, by a kind of osmosis, to the debate over partner membership in Regional Chambers.

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[6] Ibid., p.11

[7] Ibid., p.11

Involvement of non-local authority partners

If inclusiveness is one of the aims of funding bodies in setting up partnerships, two further questions arise: which stakeholders are normally included in partnerships and why, and how do those stakeholders bring benefits to the process?

In the regeneration partnerships studied by Geddes (1998), the type of partners were similar. Typically they included public sector, employers, trade unions, voluntary, and community representatives. In some cases a board would be appointed: often, according to Geddes, "[board] membership is not open but is designed to secure particular patterns of interest representation.".[8] Elsewhere associations with up to 150 members were formed: Geddes suggests that this route "often leads to much of the practical leadership being in the hands of one or a few prominent individuals.".[9] Occasionally both of these structures would be combined, with what amounts to an assembly with a separate executive committee. The membership, and the structures tried by various partnerships, all correlate with experiences of the Regional Chambers.

Geddes also notes that public sector organisations commonly predominated, both in representation and funding terms, on local partnerships. This finding is reflected in the structure of Regional Chambers, where local authorities have a majority and all funding is supplied from public sources. Geddes' findings also have some affinities with the findings of the current report with regard to means of representation: business representatives on partnerships were likely to be appointed, but local community or voluntary sector representatives were sometimes elected from within a particular constituency. The pattern of partner representation, prioritised representation from a range of sectors. The sectors were not regarded as necessarily equal: what mattered was that 'everyone is round the table'. Inclusiveness related primarily to presence, and there are few references in the literature to partners trying to exclude other partners because they felt their presence to be inappropriate. The influence of the various partners on outcomes was a secondary concern.

The obvious reason for non-local authority members to become involved in partnerships is where they can see a positive benefit to their own organisation. This benefit may consist in either influencing a local strategy which will determine the behaviour of public agencies, and/or achieving their own goals through the process. Direct influence from these organisations benefits public agencies both because it applies alternative expertise to policy issues, and because it clarifies the positions of significant interest groups on those issues.

Some criticism of the lack of business involvement in local partnerships has been evident. In some ways this is unsurprising. Almost all of the literature is in broad agreement that local partnerships must be built up over a number of years, through multiple funding cycles. That

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[8] Geddes (1998), p.98

[9] Ibid., p.98

is the necessary time-frame for building relationships and trust to a degree that a partnership can 'work' at the local level. This implies a considerable amount of early work that appears to achieve little, and much in the way of relationship-building. This kind of work is not likely to attract resource commitment from businesses, with no identifiable benefit in early sight. This was recognised by the DETR's 1999 *Good Practice Guide* which stated that "blanket guidance that states that private sector involvement is, without exception, a good thing, is unhelpful".[10]

Voluntary sector representatives—also including environmental group and 'community' representatives—have two functions in partnerships, according to Government guidance. Firstly, "the level of community and voluntary activity in an area is often a gauge of the social health and spirit of that area, and as such is a vital complementary strand to the provision of decent public services and a quality environment".[11] Secondly, representatives of these bodies are likely to have good links with individuals in the local community, and may be as, or more, directly aware of views, feelings, and requirements of local people as local elected representatives.

Resources

> Both practitioners and researchers are steadily coming to the view that partnerships, particularly at the strategic level, require some form of dedicated staff and resources.[12]

> The inadequate resources available to the community and voluntary sector are seen as a major barrier to accountability. Virtually all interviewees stressed the fact that it was inadequate *financial* and *staff time* resources which were the major barriers.[13]

Local partnerships have found that a dedicated secretariat, for co-ordination of meetings and sharing of information, is vital in enabling partners to work together as intended. Members of partnerships themselves are very unlikely to be able or willing to establish such positions themselves: increasingly, grants for partnerships have allowed for the establishment of, for example, a single secretarial post. This is particularly important to secure the involvement of voluntary and community organisations. Normally these organisations have very little money or time to spare.

The need for staff and resources goes further than administration. There was often a need to develop the capacity of community and voluntary partners to actually contribute effectively. Frequently, they "did not possess the knowledge, skills and administrative resources to be

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[10] DETR, *Local Evaluation for Regeneration Partnerships: Good Practice Guide*, 1999, p.87

[11] DETR, *Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance*, 2001, p.58

[12] DETR, *Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance*, 2001, p.68

[13] Armstrong *et al* (2002), op. cit., p.19

effective partners".[14] Few were accustomed to working together in policy development, having previously carried out an adversarial and lobbying role. There was also little experience of consulting with their 'constituency' in the manner of a representative.

Lessons for partnerships in Regional Chambers

This report finds a number of similarities between the experiences of partnerships in the Regional Chambers and the issues encountered by local partnerships, which will become clear below. The similarities between the two types of body are not overwhelming, however. Partnerships in the regions of England are likely to function in a very different way to those at local level, for three main reasons:

— the geographical area covered is far larger;

— Chambers do not have access to funding which is contingent on the existence of a partnership;

— regional government in England has been, and will continue to be, concerned with strategy-making and not delivering outputs: hence the contribution of partners will be in shaping the strategy, not in delivering it.

Possible effects of these differences might include:

— a less direct connection between partner members and the sectors which they represent;

— less initial incentive to create effective partnerships;

— different contributions from partners, and less importance for the concept of partners 'signing up' to a strategic local plan which each was then committed to help to deliver.

Since regional structures are so new to England, there has been little opportunity for analysis of regional partnership. Bridges *et al* carried out an analysis of structures adopted by RDAs in 2001. They state:

> Ultimately, effective partnership working occurs when a number of criteria are met, including:
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> — inclusive involvement of partners;
>
> — acknowledgement of existing partner knowledge and experience, and use as a formulation of future work;
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> — subsidiarity of roles where appropriate;
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> — exploitation of potential organisational synergies;
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> — development of effective and locally sensitive delivery mechanisms;
>
> — a commitment to equal opportunities.[15]

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[14] DETR, *Local Evaluation for Regeneration Partnerships: Good Practice Guide*, 1999, p.67

[15] Tom Bridges, David Edwards, John Mawson, Chris Tunnell, *Strategy Development and Partnership Working in the RDAs,* DETR, London, 2001, p.5

Fundamental to effective partnership was early involvement of partners in the development of policy. Partners were unhappy when consultation took the form of being asked for their opinion on a draft policy paper: this was perceived as too little, too late, with the existence of the paper implying that the general direction of policy had already been decided, and that the role of partners was to add value at the margins only.

Voluntary and community groups, on the other hand, were found by RDAs to suffer from similar problems to those that they suffered from with regard to local partnerships. Few had the resources or expertise to contribute effectively to strategy-making. Bridges *et al* comment also that there appeared to be little understanding by RDAs of how their skills might be used.

Fordham (1998) notes that the success of partnerships is dependent upon the commitment of, and relationships between, individuals. They argue that inter-personal relations are more fundamental than the presence of all relevant organisations in the partnership. Partnerships function, like any other organisations, through good relations between officers, not purely through a particular formal structure. Moreover, inter-personal working is easier to achieve where there is a clear rationale for the partnership. There was a tendency to appoint board-level partners by rote, because of the need to have 'a higher education representative', or because they were known to carry influence in certain forums.

Ownership

The concept of 'ownership', or 'signing up', is pivotal to understanding partnerships at all levels. This refers to a process of dialogue between partners where a consensus is achieved over a strategy: the partners may not have their ideal strategy but, feeling that their voice has been adequately heard, will agree to abide by it and use the influence of their own organisations to work in accordance with it. It is, in effect, a voluntary equivalent of the process in a democratically-elected assembly

Though this concept—that partners could reach consensus—may have always been an optimistic one, in Regional Chambers it cannot be expected to take this form, because, as suggested above, Chambers do not control the delivery functions that make the nature of the strategy of significant importance. Voluntary, community and environmental groups do not deliver policy. Business organisations differ: in the South East business representatives come from a variety of sub-regional economic partnerships, and would only be able to (theoretically) deliver in those areas (although the totality of members do cover the entire region between them). In practice, Fordham *et al* suggest that such delivery is rare:

> This can happen when the relevant board member has sufficient authority and awareness to be able to secure compliance within his or her parent organisation

and to 'read' it for signs of change which are likely to affect the partnership. Experience shows, however, that such individuals are rare.[16]

Haughton *et al*'s report stated that:

> by being drawn from particular organisational or business backgrounds, there is often an implicit or explicit assumption that they can reflect the concerns of these sectors. This is part of the 'expertise' which they bring with them…. They were [also often] expected to provide a ready channel of communication to the wider community.[17]

Clearly there is a difference between including one member on a board, or committee, from a certain sector, and a more general inclusion of the whole of that sector. Regional Chambers, where they have addressed this issue, have replaced individual appointments with elections by regional networks with in-built accountability mechanisms. Previously, partners on boards have typically been appointed, and their appointment relates to their ability or willingness to do the job and their organisational role at the time. This report found similar patterns in the Regional Chambers, though there are indications that the Chambers are beginning to address this issue.

Concluding remarks

The achievements of local partnerships in bringing together a wide range of stakeholders have been patchy. But there have been enough successes for the principle to have been absorbed by later debates over the composition of new regional bodies in the form of the Chambers. However, the context of inclusion at the regional level is likely to be different, although a similar range of types of organisation is likely to be represented. The following section looks at the formation of the Regional Chambers and the application of the principle of partnership therein.

Devolution and social and economic partners

The Government's move to establish RDAs and Regional Chambers took place in the light of devolution to Northern Ireland in 1998, Scotland and Wales in 1999, and London in 2000. In each of those territories, provisions have been made for the formal involvement of groups of 'stakeholders'. In Scotland, Northern Ireland and London this has taken place through the creation of a Civic Forum: in Wales, a joint Partnership Committee, consisting of assembly members and stakeholders, has been created. In all four territories the partnership arrangements have been active and are accepted as legitimate by the relevant governments. However, commitment to partnership is enshrined in statute only in Wales. In the other

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[16] Fordham *et al*, *Building Partnerships in the English Regions: A Study Report of Regional and Sub-Regional Partnerships in England,* DETR, 1998, p. 45

[17] Graham Haughton, Trevor Hunt, Ian Strange, Kevin Thomas, Jamie Peck, *TECs and their Non-Employer Stakeholders*, Department of Employment, 1995, p.25

territories the civic forum enjoys legitimacy but some doubts over its role. Shaw *et al* (2002) suggest:

> The statutory obligation on the part of the National Assembly to engage with the economic and social partners is a groundbreaking development. The sanction of judicial review safeguards the voluntary sector stake in the policy-making process.[18]

The definition of 'stakeholder' is not consistent across territories. The definitions used by the Civic Forums are:[19]

Scotland: "Full membership of the Forum is open to any organisation which is non-statutory, non-commercial, non-political (these others can have affiliate status)."

Northern Ireland: "The Civic Forum will consist of 60 members representative of the business, trade union, voluntary and other sectors of the Northern Ireland community."

London: "The only organisations and bodies excluded from joining are local authorities and political parties since they already have a direct relationship with regional government outside civil society. Organisations representing and serving tens of thousands of Londoners have already signed up as members of the London Civic Forum…. These range from highly influential pan-London bodies to grass roots community organisations."

Wales: the definitions are contained within the relevant sections of the Government of Wales Act 1998, as follows:

> 114. The Assembly must make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations.
>
> 115. The Assembly shall carry out consultation with such organisations representative of business and such other organisations as it considers appropriate having regard to the impact of the exercise by the Assembly of its functions on the interests of business.

The definition of 'stakeholders' used in the English regions, so far as it can be established, is closest to that of London: any organisation that is not a local authority or a political party may join. However, the purpose of the Civic Forums in the four 'territories' listed above is different from that of Regional Chambers' social and economic partners. Civic Forums exist primarily as a conduit between the elected democratic institution and 'stakeholders'. They do not act as a lobbying force themselves, and do not take direct part in policy development or recommendation in the manner that social and economic partners do.

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[18] Keith Shaw, Lynne Humphrey, Peter O'Brien, John Tomaney, *The Engagement of Economic and Social Partners in a Directly Elected Regional Assembly for the North-East*, North-East Regional Assembly, 2002, p.56

[19] Note: Each of the definitions used here comes from the website of the relevant organisation.

Conversely, the proposals in the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, start from the position that stakeholders will influence policy directly. The White Paper suggests that stakeholders could be co-opted on to scrutiny committees, possibly with voting rights; that they could be used as policy advisers; that consultative forums on specific issues, or a more general civic forum, could be created; or that an assembly could make "periodic statements" on particular policy issues, on which they could be questioned by stakeholders.

Regional Chambers

Regional Chambers, as initially proposed in two Labour Party policy documents, were intended as the beginning of a programme of decentralisation to the regions of England. These documents were *A New Voice for England's Regions*, and the Regional Policy Commission's *Renewing the Regions*, both produced in 1996. Chambers were expected to function as a step towards elected regional assemblies in England, a step which the Labour Party did not feel ready to take at the 1997 General Election. The rationale of the Chambers was partly to exercise democratic accountability of a sort over the new Regional Development Agencies and other regionally-based executive agencies, and partly to begin to create a regional civic culture of sorts: regional interests were unused to working together and frequently not aware of one another.

A New Voice for England's Regions discussed regional local government associations at some length. Some local authority associations have a long pedigree, and had been coming together for several years before the arrival of Chambers. This document itself gives credence to the idea that Regional Chambers developed through partners being added on to local government institutions:

> These local authority co-ordinating bodies are a welcome development, but they suffer from the lack of a proper framework, and from the fact that they are detached from decision-making at a regional level. Nevertheless they are the obvious starting point for a more coherent and accountable structure for English regional government.[20]

The initial plans for Chambers in this document stated that Chambers should "involve businesses, trade unions and voluntary organisations"[21], although other paragraphs state "the chambers would consist of local councillors nominated from local authorities within the region".[22]

The concept of Regional Chambers was therefore somewhat blurred from the beginning. *Renewing the Regions* did not make proposals on the membership of the Chambers; however, it did propose that they exercise significant powers, both controlling Regional Development

[20] Labour Party, *A New Voice for England's Regions*, Labour Party, 1996, p.6

[21] Ibid., p.2

[22] Ibid., p.2

Agencies and having extensive rights to consultation, by regional executive agencies, on their spending plans. These powers were not, in the end, forthcoming. Regional Chambers were set up as extremely weak bodies, referred to only twice on the face of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998.[23]

The 1998 Act, in setting up Regional Chambers, did not specify, on the face of the Act, anything regarding Regional Chamber memberships, merely stating that the Chamber should be "a body which is representative of those in a regional development agency's area with an interest in its work".[24] Government guidance specified more explicitly the Government's expectations regarding Chambers' memberships:

> The local government members should be in the majority within the chamber. We would expect non-local government members to comprise no less than 30% of the chamber. The ratio of local government to non-local government membership should not be allowed to prevent the full range of regional interests from being involved. The chamber's constitution should provide for an open process of nomination of non-local authority members, including consultation with regional partners and the opportunity for those not directly consulted to make their views known.

> …The chamber's constitution should include a requirement that the regional partners should achieve an appropriate gender, ethnic and disability balance among its members. Arrangements should be made to keep this under review. Ministers will expect to see steady progress towards a position in which men and women are equally represented on regional chambers and the proportion of disabled members and members from the ethnic minorities reflects that in the adult population.

In practice, most Chambers have either used an exact split of 70:30 between local and non-local authority members, or a split of approximately 2:1. In the instance of the South East, the 2:1 split was used. Each of the 74 local authorities in the region is given one seat: hence 37 seats must be available for the non-local authority members.

The 'social and economic partners' were expected to be representatives of business, environment, and voluntary organisations: these categories appear to have been lifted from *A New Voice for England's Regions*, although they have not been treated as exclusive by any region. Chambers were permitted freedom to decide on who the social and economic partners would be, and how they would be selected. All of the Chambers were designated in mid-1999.

In many regions, the pre-existing regional local government association had acted as the Regional Planning Body, with the responsibility of producing Regional Planning Guidance.

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[23] The Chambers were referred to at section 8 and section 18, in such a manner that their existence was entirely tied to that of the Regional Development Agencies.

[24] Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, s.8 (1) (a)

A further Government guidance note, Planning Policy Guidance note 11 (PPG11) recommended that this role should pass to Regional Chambers:

> Given the representation of a range of regional stakeholders on each Regional Chamber, and the latter's role in relation to the RDA under the RDAs Act, it makes sense for the Chamber to take on the regional planning function. Indeed a Chamber supported by a full time regional planning, monitoring and review team would be in an ideal position to provide the necessary leadership to produce and implement an integrated spatial strategy for the region. However, the arrangements to be adopted in any particular region must be for the region to decide….. Where a Chamber does not take on this role it should still be seen by the RPB and other stakeholders as a necessary reference point in the preparation of draft RPG. The views of designated Chambers should be fully taken into account in the preparation of RPG.[25]

Some regional local government associations have been slow to accede to this recommendation: at the time of writing only five out of eight regions have passed planning responsibilities to the Regional Chamber. Elsewhere the Chamber retains a consultative role. The planning role is the only other direct function enjoyed by Regional Chambers.

The Planning Green Paper of late 2001 proposed to give statutory planning powers to the Regional Chambers, to produce binding Regional Planning Guidance. County structure plans would no longer be produced. After protests from local government this latter provision appears to have been dropped, but county plans will still be subordinate to regional plans produced by Chambers. If legislative space can be found, these proposals will become law by mid-2003.

Few respondents attempted to make a positive case for the inclusion of partners: it appeared to be generally accepted as orthodoxy that they should be involved. It should be borne in mind that local authority members on Regional Chambers, at the same time, do not have good accountability mechanisms. They are described as 'indirectly elected', but this entails a very distant relationship with any constituency.

Overall, it appears that local authorities have broadly welcomed the presence of the social and economic partners on Regional Chambers, despite initial suspicions that their presence diluted the democratic accountability of the Chambers.[26] However, the reasoning as to why social and economic partners were required to be present on the Chambers—and what value they were expected to add—has never been clarified by the Government. A number of assumptions can be surmised from the literature detailed above:

— That local authority representatives alone were not sufficiently representative of a region to be solely entitled to take positions or decisions on its behalf;

[25] DETR, Planning Policy Guidance note 11, 2000, paragraphs 2.4—2.5.

[26] See Mark Sandford, *Further Steps for Regional Chambers*, Constitution Unit, 2001

— That partners have valuable experience and expertise, which adds value at the regional level. This implies, in the UK's regional structures, the level of strategic policy-making, not delivery;

— That partners were able to represent the views of their 'sector' in debates on strategic decision-making;

— That partners' involvement would aid delivery of regional strategies.

— The next two chapters analyse the practice of inclusiveness in the two case-study regions, and the findings are drawn together in the Conclusion.

The South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA)

History

The South East has a good claim to being the most diverse of the English regions. It has a population of some 8 million, stretching in a crescent-shape around London. In terms of planning and economics it continues to be strongly linked to London, which has its own 'regional government' in the form of the Greater London Authority.

The South East is also one of the few English regions to have been altered in shape during the arrival of the regional agenda in the mid- to late 1990s. The present boundaries of the region were first established in 1994, with the creation of the Integrated Regional Offices (now Government Offices for the Regions). Previously, the "South East" had included Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, which are now part of the East of England region. The remainder of the East of England region, East Anglia, was a planning region in its own right, served by SCEALA (Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities). [27]

For planning purposes the South East, historically, also included London. This created a region with a population of some 18 million people. This region maintained an independent planning body, the South East Regional Planning body or SERPLAN. This region enjoyed an approximate fit with concepts of the 'economic footprint' and travel-to-work area influenced by London. At the same time, East Anglia was regarded as possessing some limited degree of regional identity.

However, the 'new' South East boundaries were settled by the creation of the Regional Development Agencies in 1999. The Regional Development Agencies Act used the Government Office boundaries. Hence, the South East Regional Chamber was also set up on the 'new' boundaries. There were some initial attempts to set up a 'federal'-style Chamber, with sub-regional chambers sending delegates, but these were eventually abandoned.

The fact that the South East regional institutions were set up following boundary reforms is significant, because it permitted the creation of a Regional Chamber from scratch. This was a different situation to that in most other regions, where regional local government associations had been in existence for many years. Those RLGAs often acted as the regional planning body, producing Regional Planning Guidance, and were accustomed, as local government representatives, to being the sole democratic representative voice at regional level.

The South East's predecessor, SERPLAN, which operated on the 'old' boundaries, had begun tentatively to involve non-local authority representatives in its final few years of existence. A

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[27] SEERA, the GLA, and the East of England Regional Assembly have organised a joint committee on planning matters, which meets twice per year.

body called the South East Regional Forum (SERF)was created in the late 1990s with the task of exploring how to involve partner organisations during the time in which the new Regional Chambers in the South East and East of England were replacing the previous body. In the event SERF had some influence in the writing of the constitution of what became the South East England Regional Assembly: and some of the partner members who currently sit on the Regional Assembly were involved in that process. The presence of a voice for non-local authority representatives this early in the process was undoubtedly a factor in normalising the existence of a full role for them. This contrasts with the 'late' involvement mentioned in Bridges *et al*'s report on RDA partnership.

An added effect of the change in boundaries was that there was little controversy over the new Regional Chamber taking on the planning powers that had previously belonged to SERPLAN. It was the first of the Regional Chambers to do so: in other regions the partners were initially (and some are still) not permitted to vote or to take part in regional debates on planning matters. It is important to note that SERPLAN was *only* a planning organisation, and not a regional local government association in the manner of those existing in other regions. Thus the South East had an added advantage as there was no local government interest group at the regional level which stood to feel threatened by the partnership principle proposed for the Regional Chambers by government.

Procedures in SEERA

The 74 local authorities in SEERA operate under a weighted voting system. The 55 district councils have one vote each. The partner members have two votes each. The seven county councils have one vote per district council, and the 12 unitary authorities have votes according to population (see Table 1).

Table 1: voting rights on SEERA	
Members	**Number of votes**
Counties	
Surrey	11
East Sussex	5
West Sussex	7
Kent	12
Hampshire	11
Buckinghamshire	4
Oxfordshire	5
Unitary authorities	
Bracknell Forest, Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead, Isle of Wight, Reading, Wokingham, West Berkshire (100-150,000)	3 each
Portsmouth (150-200,000)	4 each
Brighton & Hove, Medway, Southampton, Milton Keynes (200-300,000)	5 each
Social and Economic Partners	2 each
District councils	1 each
Parish and town council representatives[28]	1 each

SEERA's constitution specifies the type of organisations that can be allocated seats as social and economic partners as: "voluntary sector; business organisations; environment; economic partnerships; higher education; further education; trades unions; culture, sports, arts, tourism; health; rural interests."[29] It does not, however, specify the allocation of seats between those interests, or specify what types of organisations should be permitted to take those seats. The numbers of seats allocated to each category, like many of the representatives themselves, appear to have been arbitrarily decided at the time of the creation of the Chamber. Some respondents admitted that the early membership of the Chamber was essentially those people who were in the right place at the right time: the issue of the membership was secondary to actually getting SEERA functioning. The current allocation of the partners' seats in SEERA is shown in Table 2:

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[28] There are three parish and town council representatives on SEERA, who do not fit easily into either the local government or stakeholder groups

[29] SEERA Constitution 6.10

Table 2: allocation of partners' seats on SEERA		
Organisation	**Means of election**	**Number of seats**
TUC	Appointed	2
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	Appointed	1
Chambers of Commerce	Elected by umbrella body	1
Federation of Small Businesses	Appointed	1
Further Education (FE)	Chair of umbrella body	1
Higher Education (HE)	Chair of umbrella body	1
South East Economic Partnerships (SEEPS)	Elected by each of the 10 Economic Partnership boards	10
Economic partners		**17**
Regional Cultural Consortium	Appointed by RCC board	3
South East Forum for Sustainability (SEFS)	Elected by SEFS board	3
Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE)	Elected by RAISE members	7
Black and minority ethnic	*Part of RAISE*	*1*
CVS & regeneration	*Part of RAISE*	*1*
Health and social care	*Part of RAISE*	*3*
Rural issues	*Part of RAISE*	*1*
Urban issues / Learning and development	*Part of RAISE*	*1*
Social Housing	Appointed	1
Faith Communities	Elected	2
National Health Service	Appointed	1
Social and environmental partners		**17**

SEERA is unusual amongst the eight Regional Chambers in that it distinguishes between 'economic partners' and 'social and environmental' partners. In most other Chambers there exists a single group known as 'social and economic partners'. In SEERA, however, the two groups sit and function separately (see below). They are treated as separate groups in SEERA's constitution: for instance, it is specified that each group must provide a vice-chair to the Assembly. Each group is also entitled to a proportion of the seats on each committee of

the Assembly. The reasoning behind this decision was purely an assumption during the creation of the Chamber that the phrase 'social and economic partners' related to two groups of representatives. (This reflects the division in the consultation arrangements in the National Assembly for Wales.) Nor are there clear rules as to what kind of organisation should sit with which group. One respondent noted that, counter-intuitively, TUC, FE and HE representatives sat with the economic partners, and attributed this to a shared interest in skills and economic issues: whereas the NHS representative shared interests of environment, housing and regeneration with the social and environmental group.

The means of selection of members to fill these seats vary: they are shown in Table 1. The procedures of selection are gradually becoming more democratic. Early in the lives of the Regional Chambers, the members sat as individuals rather than representatives. However, SEERA's current constitution requires certain conditions of the partner members:

> 6.2 Assembly members will be determined by their nominating bodies, i.e. for local government members, their local authorities, and for social, environmental and economic partners, their sector-based regional groupings or networks.

> 6.4…Members of the Assembly will be expected to be individually accountable to their nominating constituency.

> 6.5 All nominating bodies must ensure that the processes through which they choose their nominees to the Assembly must be fair, open and transparent. In the case of social, environmental and economic partners, each Assembly member must be able to demonstrate their accountability to a clear and distinct constituency in the region.[30]

SEERA has aimed to encourage and aid the partners in meeting these aims: for instance, it has funded a post, within the voluntary sector umbrella body (RAISE), dedicated to improving communication and information exchange between the 17 social and environmental partners. One of the priorities of this post is to work with the partner bodies to examine and improve their methods of selection of members.

The formal inclusion of SEPs in the shape of SEERA

The South East England Regional Assembly operates rules of proportionality on its committees. There are only four formal committee structures: these are the Executive, Healthy Region Forum, Regional Planning Committee and the Joint Europe Committee. The eight boxes at the bottom of figure 3 are known as 'Advisory Groups': their role is explained further below. The executive committee has 27 members, including one chair (Conservative) and five vice-chairs (one each from the Liberal Democrats, Labour, independents (ie non-party politicians), Economic Partners, and Social and Environmental Partners). 45 members

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[30] SEERA Constitution section 6: see http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/the_assembly/constitution.html

of SEERA do not sit on any of the committees, whilst there are 9 who sit on more than one committee.

Figure 3 : SEERA Organisation Chart
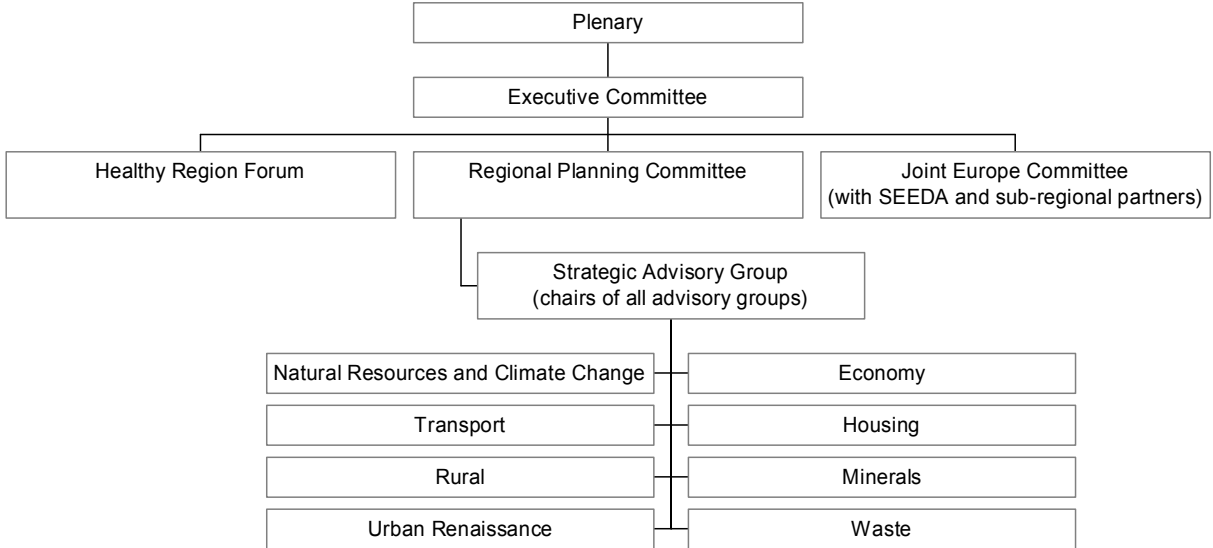
Table 4 shows the number of members from each party or group on the four main committees. This pattern of proportionality is accepted as standard within the Assembly. In Table 4, 'SEP' refers to social and environmental partners and 'EP' to economic partners.

Table 4: membership of committees on SEERA by party					
	Conservative	Lib Dem	Labour	SEP	EP	Other[31]
Executive	7	4	2	3	4	1
Healthy Region	7	4	2	3	3	3
Planning	7	4	2	3	3	1
Europe	3	2	1	1	0	1

All of the members on all of the committees are entitled to one vote. The weighted system described in Table 1 is used only in plenary. It is important to note, however, that votes are rarely taken: these committees do not use drawn-out systems of voting line-by-line on statements or policy amendments in the manner of central or local government. It is more common for general debates to be held in committee, with general agreements that the policy or strategy under debate will be redrafted by officers, and resubmitted for approval. Hence the significance of voting rights is far more restricted than in other tiers of government.

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[31] "Other" includes independent councillors, town and parish councillors, and one co-opted member on the Healthy Region forum.

To increase inclusiveness and to avoid the impression that the partners were secondary to local authority members, SEERA attempted to move away from various forms of local government procedures fairly early on. Partner organisations expressed the view that they were both a symbolic and an actual deterrent to sustained inclusiveness. All kinds of partners (not merely economic partners) were unwilling to participate in complex, jargon-riddled modes of working: these views led to the simplification of most procedures at an early date. Some respondents expressed frustration at a perceived tendency of local government members to make long speeches instead of substantive points. Shaw *et al* record that related problems had taken longer to resolve in the North-East, quoting respondents as saying:

> People working within a one-party state aren't used to criticism, they don't respond well to it and they don't want to share power.[32]

> At the moment, the [North-East] assembly merely replicates traditional 'local authority' ways of working—Labour council leaders preside over committees with large agendas and huge amounts of documentation.[33]

Typically, SEERA meetings are not held in council chambers but in 'neutral' venues such as hotels or conference suites. Moreover, SEERA made a conscious decision at its formation not to rent office space from a local authority, which was the route taken by several other regions when they urgently needed office space during their setting-up. Instead, they took up residence in the Government Office for the South East before transferring, in 2001, to their own independent office. The impact of these symbolic decisions on partner morale should not be underestimated; they were important in convincing partners that inclusiveness was a serious aim, not a mere 'add-on', of the Assembly.

Inclusion through umbrella bodies

The existence of umbrella bodies is becoming an increasing feature of the regional agenda. The majority of them have been set up specifically in response to the expanding agenda of regional administration—in other words, to lobby government (not merely Regional Chambers) on regional issues at the appropriate level. In the two regions studied, following negotiation with Chamber officers, some have been permitted to elect or nominate representatives on to the Chambers. The three foremost umbrella bodies in the South East are RAISE, SEFS and SEEPS.

RAISE (Regional Action and Involvement South East) is a membership organisation for the voluntary and community sector. It has the most sophisticated representation system in the two regions. It developed from a seedcorn grant of £40,000 made in mid-2000 by the Home Office. This sum was used to apply for more funding: some £400,000 over three years was

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[32] Shaw *et al*, op. cit., p.17

[33] Ibid., p.18

obtained. There is a staff of seven, occupying an office above that of SEERA (though the two organisations are independent). There is no membership fee for organisations wishing to join RAISE—hence small organisations are not excluded for financial reasons. There are currently some 1400 members.

RAISE selects seven of the social and environmental partners on SEERA. It has five electoral colleges (listed in Table 1), and each member must designate themselves to vote in one of those colleges. Any member may stand as a candidate in those elections. The elections are set to take place every two years, with the first having taken place in May 2002. Perhaps unsurprisingly, several of the members who had been selected in the early days of SEERA were re-elected through this process. However, the elections were contested, showing that the existence of the electoral process is permitting greater participation by partner groups.

SEFS (South East Forum for Sustainability) was set up in 1999, with the aim of co-ordinating the responses of environmental organisations toward the new regional agenda. It selects three members of the Regional Assembly. It has a smaller membership than RAISE—around 100. Many of these are multiple branches of single organisations—for instance, some 35 local branches of Friends of the Earth are members. Because of this duplication SEFS does not operate a full franchise to elect its Regional Assembly members, as it would give undue power to a small number of organisations: instead, the 12-strong Executive Committee votes for the three seats. At the most recent election there were four candidates for these three seats.

SEEPS is a loose forum of the ten Economic Partnerships which are each entitled to a seat on the Regional Assembly. They have less administrative support than the other two groups, and SEEPS is not a membership organisation in the same sense. The SEEPS representatives are elected by the boards of their individual economic partnerships, though there is less competition for these elections than amongst the other umbrella bodies. The Economic Partnerships cover the entirety of the region between them: they come from Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent & Medway, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Thames Valley, and West Sussex.

It is too early to judge whether the elections for these positions permit a meaningful level of inclusion. The umbrella bodies make efforts at reaching out to unaware organisations: and it should be noted that the 'constituencies' are dissimilar to traditional democratic constituencies. Firstly, they are small, and finite; there are only a given number of voluntary organisations in a region. Secondly, the voluntary organisations have something to gain from participation in the regional agenda: influence and involvement in general policy-making, and the opportunity to influence the specifics, which is concurrent with their own organisational mission. Neither of those factors is present with the same force for participation of the public in democratic elections.

There are several points in the system at which inclusiveness could be restricted. The most salient are the lack of time that many voluntary groups, volunteers, and staff will have in

which to take an interest in the issues addressed by the Assembly, some of which are quite complex: and a consequent low level of interest. However, umbrella bodies are probably the best answer available to the question of involving partner representation over a wide geographical area. The purpose of the Regional Chambers is to influence long-term strategic regional thinking, not to choose immediate local priorities.

The individual members

Inclusiveness takes place not only through wider participation in electoral systems. It is also affected by the nature of the elected or appointed individuals on the Chambers themselves. It is valid to examine who these individuals are, why they have stood, and were able to stand, for election, and to what extent they carry out a representative role comparable to the traditional role of democratically elected members.

No systematic profile of the social and economic partners was taken as part of this research. However, the researcher interviewed a number of the most active partners in each assembly. General impressions were that the social and economic partners tended to range in age from 35-55—slightly younger than the norm for local councillors. However, as with local councillors, there were few women or black/minority ethnic partner members.

The majority of the most active partner members were able to be as active as they were because they held full-time jobs relating to regional engagement. Thus, time spent on SEERA business was within their job description, or there existed considerable synergy between their job and their role on SEERA. Many, however, relied upon sympathetic line managers to permit them to devote the time they did—one remarked "we all have different exceptional reasons as to why [we are] able to do it".

Some members' hours of work were considerably lengthened by the time they spent on Assembly business. Regional Chambers take up a considerable amount of their members' time—estimates for the most active respondents were between 1-2 days per week. Though this level of commitment may be inevitable, this kind of time commitment will exclude many potential candidates from membership or significant commitment: one of the roles of the liaison officer at RAISE, mentioned above, was to inform potential candidates for committee places of the likely time commitment.

SEERA pays an allowance to its five vice-chairs, in the region of £3,000 per annum, and a smaller allowance to its committee chairs. RAISE itself also pays travel expenses to its seven members of SEERA. These compensations are no doubt valuable, but do not fully meet the non-financial contributions made by members.

Respondents were asked whether they viewed their role as partner members as one of representing their sector or 'constituency', which in most cases had elected them, or as one of contributing their knowledge and taking positions as they saw fit. Responses to this issue were mixed. One environmental member stated that he considered himself to represent SEFS

(South East Forum for Sustainability) on the plenary and the one committee of which he was a member. However, this person was also a member of two advisory groups, which he considered himself to have been invited on to due to his expertise. He did not, therefore, carry out a representative role there. In this particular case, SEFS members sit on a number of advisory groups and are able to co-ordinate their position, due to the secretarial support that is available to them.

At the same time, most respondents were clear that the main benefit that partners brought to SEERA was their expert knowledge. Indeed, the majority of them tended to speak only on issues where they had expert knowledge.[34] There was no sense that every sector must have its say on every regional issue. The range of membership means that expertise in most areas of public policy is available on the Assembly.

Representation of the views of 'sectoral constituents' was more likely to take place through informal contact with Assembly officers. That was part of what amounted to an internal consultation process on drafts of regional strategies and/or policy statements, where officers would draft and redraft according to the comments of committee members. This 'informal inclusiveness', which has as significant a role as formal procedures in the Regional Chambers, is discussed further below.

There seems little doubt that, at the inception of the Chamber, the seats were mainly filled by interested parties who happened to be available. The means by which they were chosen was described as being "in smoke-filled rooms" by one of those parties themselves. There was no clear indication, at the time of the Chambers' formation and designation in 1998-99, that they would become important regional players. Hence seats were often taken by those willing to give time—in what was described by one respondent as "an act of faith". Conversely, respondents stressed that no value was gained by inactive members occupying seats on behalf of a particular sector. For instance, one particular member was reported to have never attended a meeting and to also be refusing to answer e-mail or telephone messages from the secretariat. Respondents suggested that this member could be replaced by someone from a different sector who was willing to contribute: the change of balance in membership that would result was not a problem.

A particular issue that affects SEERA is the impression, from some respondents, that there is a 'core' of some 30-40 members of SEERA who contribute far more than the remaining members. They turn up to all relevant meetings, read background papers, and concern themselves with strategic regional issues. The remainder of members are not so closely involved: to some respondents, it was inevitable that, in an assembly of 111, many members would take on a peripheral role, making no 'meaningful contribution' but simply turning up

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[34] This parallels the House of Lords, where members enjoy debating and voting rights, but many exercise them only on matters of expertise—and also sit part-time.

and voting when necessary. One respondent characterised this situation with regard to a meeting attended by the author:

> You had a full turnout [today] because it was election time. You had people there who hadn't a clue what was going on. They were just there to vote. That's why certain people weren't saying anything, hadn't even got the papers…or had sent along their substitutes.

At the meeting in question (attended by the author), there was a striking distinction between those who spoke and those who did not. Some 90% of points were made by seven committee members, who spoke repeatedly, with seven others not speaking once. This was not due to bad chairmanship; all of those who wanted to speak were able to do so. It was clear that the interest in *making contributions* was confined to a smaller group than the full committee. In plenary, it would be equally possible for the 45 members who do not sit on any committee to be comparably 'semi-detached'. One respondent stated that, to become involved in SEERA, it was vital to be proactive. There were few restrictions, but SEERA did not have the resources to help everyone to become involved. SEERA's website was well-maintained, and all relevant information could be downloaded from it.

Thus a particular type of individual has emerged to fill the role of social and economic partners. These are people with three things: time, expertise and proactivity. That implicitly excludes a substantial number of people from the possibility of standing for positions on SEERA. But it is not unreasonable to expect members to play a part in making inclusiveness work: it cannot be merely 'provided' by officers or structures.

Communication between members and 'constituencies'

How do individual members communicate with, and make themselves accountable to, their constituencies? The answer lies in very effective use of information technology. In SEERA's case, the social and environmental partner representatives typically type up reports of the meetings that they have attended. These are then sent to all of the 17 social and environmental partners, who then pass the reports on to their own constituencies. In some cases the process goes still further: for instance, Age Concern, which is a member of RAISE, then passes the reports on to *their* member groups. This process was described as 'cascading' by several respondents.

Conversely, the process of cascading creates an e-mail chain through which 'constituents' can ask questions, or make requests for points to be taken up by their representative with regard to SEERA policies—a kind of virtual surgery. Frequently such enquiries are referred direct to SEERA staff; no obligation is felt to use channels of communication that conform to formal democratic norms—that is, via members. The Assembly is small, voluntary and, by the standards of governmental institutions, informal: there is therefore less need to imitate those norms.

ICT has come into its own due to a range of factors peculiar to the Regional Chambers. The membership of SEERA is part-time, whilst the staff is full-time. The partner members are developing sectoral constituencies which differ in fundamental ways from democratic constituencies. Their members are largely interested in single issues, and join the constituencies on that basis. And the members are professional groups, with considerable knowledge of the issues; they will also often have a strong organisational interest in influencing outcomes of regional policy, but very little time in which to actively influence that policy due to the demands of their own work. Hence ICT permits a good response rate, and the nature of the constituency means that many comments will be well-informed and useful. ICT is vital in making this process of inclusion work effectively.

It is beyond the scope of this project to evaluate how well these means of accountability work. But their existence means that there is far more scope for inclusion of opinions from a wide range of non-member partners than would otherwise be the case. In this the partners have received encouragement from SEERA's secretariat. In publications, efforts are made to publicise the existence of social and economic partner members alongside local authority members, treating the two as being of equal status.

Shaw *et al*'s report on the North-East Regional Assembly of June 2002 made similar findings, noting that:

> In most of the partner constituencies, however, genuine efforts were being made to develop more formalised approaches to partner appointment and accountability…. Mechanisms noted by partners include:
> — partners being nominated from within the regular meetings of the umbrella bodies (albeit, in a few cases, from small regional groupings of statutory agencies);
> — Regular reporting back to such meetings, often via a standing item on the meeting's agenda
> — Use of e-mail bulletins within the wider sector, both to provide information and to elicit views;
> — Dissemination of information on the NEA via newsletters or the holding of one-day seminars or special meetings on regional government.[35]

Inclusion outside of plenary and formal committees

The formal structures are not the only means by which inclusion takes place. SEERA's structure stretches wider than its membership alone. Indeed, the line between members and non-members is not as strictly drawn as in other levels of government. It is common for meetings to include presentations or for Government Office representatives to advise on

[35] Shaw *et al*, op. cit., p.21

their position. Moreover, formal votes are very rare: the power to vote enjoyed by members is little used, allowing contributions from non-members a comparatively higher profile.

Besides this, the advisory groups (displayed in Figure 2) are the other primary source of inclusion. These are convened and chosen by invitation: members are chosen for their experience and knowledge, and are not intended to be democratically accountable. No elected councillors sit on them: there are representatives of local authorities, but all of these are officers. There also exists a Strategic Guidance Group, consisting of the chairs of the eight Advisory Groups. This co-ordinates the work of the eight groups, avoiding overlap where necessary.

Some of the partner members of SEERA also sit on advisory groups. Other members of the groups are invited from outside of SEERA on the basis of their expertise. But convening advisory groups for the benefit of SEERA's planning team is a top-down form of inclusion. Through this method, the partners are given no opportunity to comment on issues of wider interest than (for instance) housing or waste; it is not clear to what extent they are able to use advisory group meetings to highlight cross-cutting parts of policy.

Constitutionally speaking, there is a curious elision here between the status of officers and members, reflecting the lack of clarity in the rationale for including the partners in the first place. On the one hand partners are elected, through electoral colleges, to represent their sector on the full assembly. At the same time, in their role as experts, they are invited on to advisory groups to feed in their expertise to officers; hence their voices are heard at two separate points in the policy-making process. This reflects the constitutionally amorphous nature of the Chambers generally.

The advisory groups may also commission task groups, in effect sub-committees, to produce reports on specific subjects within their wider brief. This is similar to the system of rapporteurs used in the European Parliament's committee system, where single members of committees are tasked with carrying out specific research and reporting back to the committee. Advisory groups have also commissioned research from outside consultants. All of the advisory groups report to the planning officials and the Regional Planning Committee.

The character of advisory groups is different from that of the 'official' committees: they are less formal, and tend more towards open discussions rather than formality of proceedings. Despite the previous remarks about moving away from local government norms, formality still characterises the committees. This is probably inevitable given their size and decision-making role. One respondent also claimed that there is less tendency in the advisory groups than in the committees towards political point-scoring. Members of advisory groups are selected for their knowledge and willingness to give time: some have, in the past, been quietly asked to leave when it has been apparent that they have not been contributing a great deal.

Inclusiveness and size

The majority of regional chambers are relatively large, ranging in size from 60-117. The exceptions to this rule are YHA (35 members) and East of England Regional Assembly (42 members). SEERA is the second largest of the Regional Chambers, with 111 members. It is also the largest region in England by population (8 million) and has arguably the weakest regional identity of the English regions. The size of the region was the major determinant of the large size of the assembly, due to the desire to represent each of the 74 local authorities.

Respondents varied in their attitude to the large size of SEERA. For some, the need to be properly representative of a large and diverse region outweighed the issue of size. Some partners even felt that there should be greater representation to give them more members. The tendency towards larger Chambers has been linked to the issue of inclusiveness; it was felt in some quarters that Chambers of 30-40 could not be properly 'representative of the region'.

For others, the size of the assembly was far too great for meaningful participation by all members. In part this relates to the existence of the 'core group' of members, mentioned earlier. But the sheer size of the grouping, for these respondents, made it impossible to discuss or debate issues in the plenary sessions. Even the most animated of members would be fortunate to make more than one point.

Respondents admitted that much of the 'real work' of the Assembly goes on outside both the plenary and the committees. The size of the plenary makes it impossible to hold meaningful debates: those are restricted to committees and advisory groups. The pattern of plenary meetings is generally to give approval to decisions which have already been negotiated between groups, rather than to facilitate either real or set-piece debates. One partner said:

> This is clearly a political process. What happens at the plenary is high theatre.…Basically, when you go into a meeting, you're rubber-stamping what has previously been agreed. Everything happens before the meetings. Some people don't like that, but we live in the real world.

This process is abetted by the sheer amount of business that the Assembly is expected to deal with in a very limited time: there are only three plenary and six Executive meetings per year. It is inevitable that political bargaining will make an appearance in such an environment, where the priority is upon making decisions as opposed to open-ended discussion. Interestingly, the majority of partner respondents did not seem to inherently object to becoming political actors; one said:

> If the partners don't realise they're in a political arena, and aren't as astute as they can be on what's winnable and what isn't, what the influences are and so on, then we're not going to be particularly effective.

The same respondent stated, by way of example, that the environmental partners had made a consciously political decision not to pursue a certain issue at SEERA's plenary meeting in July 2002. They had decided to hold their fire for two issues that were likely to become very

pressing in the latter part of 2002, aware that if they spent considerable time on the current, lesser, issue, they ran the risk of being dismissed as constantly negative when the later, larger issues were discussed. This respondent said that remaining part of the political process was of paramount importance.

It is difficult to evaluate the implications for inclusiveness of these findings. Whilst non-local authority members do appear to have influenced the workings and tone of regional assembly meetings and decision-making, they have become co-opted into political processes. There was a recognition by some that decision-making processes would inevitably mean political behaviour. At the same time two respondents clearly believed that there should be a regular turnover in partner membership: they did not see themselves as becoming long-term full-time politicians.

Groups outside inclusion structures

What are the opportunities for organisations to be included if they sit outside the formal structures described? SEERA members and officers were clear in their desire not to expand the assembly membership further, or to spend time tinkering with the pattern of seat allocation. Generally it is believed that the constitutional shape of the assembly is approximately correct. Organisations that are new to the regional agenda are normally encouraged to join one of the 'umbrella bodies' described in the previous section, rather than expect to be entitled to a seat in their own right.

At present only 19 of SEERA's 111 members are women, and only three come from a BME community (all three are partners, meaning none of the elected councillors come from those communities). The South East has some concentrations of BME communities, particularly in Gravesend and Slough, but these are not reflected on SEERA. There was some concern that the fact that these 'sectors' were not adequately represented was detrimental to SEERA's working as well as its image: the stereotypical retired white male still carried a considerable influence within the Assembly.

It was noted earlier that the social and economic partners tended to be slightly younger than the average age for local authority councillors. However, they do not notably improve on local authority figures for participation of women or of black and minority ethnic groups. Respondents identified this as one of the areas in which the Assembly had made limited progress so far. There had been an early attempt to oblige all members of the assembly to designate as their 'alternate'[36] a person of a different gender or ethnicity to themselves; this had failed.

Of equal concern was the belief in some quarters that the business representatives were not fully engaged in the Assembly. With the exception of one or two people who held or had

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[36] Each local authority member must designate an 'alternate' who may attend meetings and vote on their behalf.

held office (as chairs or vice-chairs of committees), there was some feeling, though not universal, that businesses were not as involved as they might be. Indeed, one business representative appeared to confirm this approach:

> The economic partners approach the whole thing with a degree of—cynicism would be too strong a word, but…it's a watching brief. You've got to be there because these buggers might do something we don't like, but you're not going to actively create a bureaucracy.

The literature on partnerships reviewed earlier indicated that business involvement in joint enterprises of any kind could be difficult to maintain. Indeed, headlines were created in the North-West in late 2001 when some business representatives walked out of the North-West Regional Assembly, citing over-bureaucratisation and ignoring of their views as reasons. Businesses, being concerned with outcomes rather than processes, will inevitably fit uneasily into a system which uses process to maintain a form of democratic accountability and inclusiveness. It is perhaps unsurprising that they should be unwilling to concern themselves with process: the representative above stated that "the social and environmental partners seem to take constitutions…far more seriously than the economic partners, whereas we operate on a much more relaxed basis." In the North-East, Shaw *et al* report a somewhat cavalier attitude to selection and accountability in the business sector on the Regional Assembly:

> Some business partners clearly acknowledged that there was a very 'informal' approach to nomination in their sector, with individual expressions of interest being confirmed through business networks rather than through adoption at a formal meeting.[37]

The effects of equality of membership

Almost all of the respondents in interviews declared that SEERA treated its social and economic partners as full members in every way. Many praised the Assembly secretariat for the concerted efforts they had made to do so. The only exception to this rule is that partners are not currently allowed to stand for Chair of the Assembly—a situation which may be addressed by a current review of SEERA's constitution (which is itself being chaired by an economic partner). In July a social and environmental partner was elected as vice-chair of the planning committee.

Partner respondents themselves believe that the benefits they bring in terms of the general debate on SEERA centre around avoiding parochialism and diluting politicisation and point-scoring. It was acknowledged by many respondents that most local authority members had kept point-scoring to a minimum. Nevertheless, the value of the partners could be felt in other ways, as described by one:

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[37] Shaw *et al*, op.cit., p.20

> We decided before the previous planning meeting that we weren't happy with the right to buy. It has an adverse effect on the housing supply in the South East. And we were able in the meeting to get through a motion calling on the Government to fundamentally examine the right to buy and how it affects people. That came from us. If it had come from Labour, the Conservatives would have been hostile. But we were coming from a purely pragmatic, not political, point [of view].

Repeatedly, partner respondents expressed the view that local authority politicians tended towards parochial issues in their contributions to the Assembly. It was claimed that they saw themselves as local authority representatives first, delegated to bring results back from the region, and as regional politicians a poor second. Some respondents stated that there were a few exceptions to this, mostly amongst the 'core group' of 30-40 members.

It was felt that partners were readier to take a strategic, regional viewpoint. Some attributed this to the fact that their own 'constituency', in the form of the electoral college through which they obtained their seat, was regionally-based, whilst some attributed it more to the nature of their expertise (environmental issues or affordable housing, for instance, sit much more readily at regional than at local level). The writer saw some evidence of this tendency at the SEERA planning committee, when a number of points relating to specific localities were made by local authority representatives.

One officer queried this neat division of approach, claiming that there was just as much chance of partner members adopting a narrow sectoral approach, focusing on the knowledge and concerns of their own sector instead of the holy grail of 'what is good for the region as a whole'.[38] This person identified a tendency for partners to treat local authorities with "intellectual disdain", whilst in fact the partners themselves could be guilty of 'sectoral parochialism':

> I think one of the great myths is that the local authority members come from the narrow perspective of a local authority…[They] often have a much stronger hold on reality, and what's achievable, because they're used to delivering. A lot of people in the voluntary sector don't deliver very much.

Money

The funding awarded to each Regional Chamber by the Government has not merely been used to fulfil the strict functions of the Regional Chambers—monitoring the Regional Development Agencies and, in some regions, carrying out planning functions—but also for wider capacity-building; some has been spent, for instance, on aiding the capacity of voluntary organisations simply to take a full part in the Assembly. It was a common complaint before the announcement of the funding that voluntary bodies, with very tight

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[38] Some partner respondents did speak as if 'what is good for the region' were not a fundamentally contested point of view; others recognised its political connotations.

budgets, were being expected to contribute considerable time and effort to the regional agenda without compensation.

The announcement of central government funding has also largely removed the sentiment, held by some in local government, that local government should hold the predominant role in Regional Chambers, as the Chambers were funded by local government subscription payments. There had been some attempts during the setting-up of Chambers to require partner organisations to pay subscriptions also (local government subscription fees are typically in the range of £5,000-£50,000 per annum).

Attitudes of partner and local authority members

Part of the rationale for this report was a belief that the formal division in Regional Chambers between local authority and partner members is reflected in the attitudes of the members themselves. There were some assumptions that the two would form two distinct 'blocs' in Chambers.

In the South East, partner respondents believed that there existed mutual respect between the two groups. However, the relationships within the partner groups were not so clear-cut. There was some feeling from the social and environmental partners that economic partners were less committed to the regional agenda and less interested in participating. One partner member questioned whether the economic partners should be on the assembly at all, as they potentially stood to benefit directly from decisions which the Assembly made. Another pointed out that the ten economic partnerships (which are entitled to a seat each) are directly funded by SEEDA (the South East England Development Agency)—an apparent conflict of role, if not of interest. Occasionally some partners indicated that other partners were felt to be not contributing as much as they might:

> In [the authority in which I live] there are 80 councillors. They could send the councillor in charge of toilets if they wanted to, but they don't. They send the leader…. We are in a very privileged position to actually be allowed to play. I think some people [other partner representatives] don't actually understand that.

One of the environmental organisation representatives drew a further distinction between the social and the environmental partners. The latter have three seats on SEERA whilst the former have seven. The respondent compared this representation in the light of the concept of sustainable development—a commitment to which is written into SEERA's constitution— being a balance of economic, social, and environmental development.

The mutual respect between local authority and partner members has developed mainly, according to respondents, through the practice of working together and getting to know one another. Though formal equality was in place from the beginning of SEERA, relationships have since developed which ensure its practice. This has been aided so far by the relatively low turnover of all members. Most of the leading local authority members have not lost their

council seats (which automatically removes them from membership of the Assembly) and most of the leading social and economic partners have been re-selected.

The Yorkshire & Humber Assembly (YHA)

History

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly covers the former counties of West and South Yorkshire, Humberside (including North and North-East Lincolnshire), and North Yorkshire. Its population is 4.9 million. It contains 15 unitary authorities, one county council (North Yorkshire) and six district councils.

Yorkshire and Humber has one of the strongest regional identities amongst the eight standard regions of England. Yorkshire is, of course, a traditional county area: the regional identity extends less clearly to 'the Humber', which refers to the parts of Lincolnshire absorbed by the former county of Humberside in 1974. It also has a fairly strong tradition of joint working. It might be expected, therefore, that the problem referred to above, of a local authority body being unwilling to share power with new regional partners, would occur there. In fact, this has not been the case. Although it was not until October 2001 that full equality of membership was achieved, the intention had long been present; it had merely been subject to administrative delays.

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly has a curiously chequered history. In its present form it has existed only from October 2001. At this time two previous organisations, the Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Chamber and the Regional Assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside (RAYH), were formally merged. The RAYH was the regional local government association, which had been formed in 1996 in anticipation of the then-nascent regional policy agenda. It operated a voting system which was weighted by population, and had some 50-60 sitting members, whose selection related both to representing local authorities and to regionally proportional representation for the three major political parties.

Formally the Chamber and RAYH were separate bodies. In practice RAYH took the lead in most regional matters and administered funding which was available from local authority subscriptions. It consulted the social and economic partner groups—in effect consulting the Chamber—for all major decisions.

The lead-up to the merger was preceded by 6-8 months of organisational uncertainty which delayed progress on a number of fronts. The merger changed relatively little with regard to the organisational structures at officer level. At member level, however, it marked the acceptance of the social and economic partners as full members with voting rights. They were also accepted as full members for the purposes of planning issues. The 22 local authority representatives are the leaders of the 22 local authorities. The political parties are obliged to inform the Assembly plenary if they have carried out pre-meeting caucusing to come to an agreed position on any issue.

Procedures and members

The YHA has a very small number of full members: 35 in all. These are supplemented by a number of 'associate members' or observers, from various statutory authorities, who have the right to speak but not to vote. The constitution of YHA provides for the partner representation shown in Table 5. Both the groups and the number of representatives are specified, though the constituents of each group are not defined. The means of allocation of numbers to each sector is clearer than that in the South East; as only 14 places are available, most organisations are only entitled to one seat. The three business seats are normally taken by the CBI, Chamber of Commerce, and the Federation of Small Businesses—hence seeking to achieve a rounded representation of business interests.

Table 5: membership of social and economic partners on YHA[39]		
Sector	**Means of election**	**Number of seats**
Business	Appointed	3
Health	Appointed	1
Environment	Elected from umbrella body	1
TUC	Appointed	1
Rural	Elected from umbrella body	1
Faith	Appointed	1
Voluntary and Community	Elected from umbrella body	1
Further Education	Appointed	1
Higher Education	Appointed	1
Regional Cultural Consortium	Appointed	1
Learning and Skills Council	Appointed	1
Black and ethnic minority	Under construction	1 (currently seeking member)
Total		**14**

The YHA constitution specifies two categories of "associate membership" and "observers":

> 4. The Assembly may at any time admit other authorities, organisations or agencies having an interest in the work of the Assembly to be associate members.

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[39] See Yorkshire and Humber Assembly Constitution, Annex A, available at http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk

5. Observers: these will include the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward), the Environment Agency, and any other organisations that from time to time the Assembly may determine.[40]

At present there is one associate member—South Yorkshire Police—and two other observer organisations in addition to the three specified in the constitution: a Parish Councils representative and one from the Countryside Agency. It should also be mentioned that one seat is currently being held vacant for a representative of black and minority ethnic groups (which will increase the number of SEPs to 15 when appointed). There have been difficulties in finding an appropriate person to fill this seat.[41]

The membership of YHA owes a good deal to initiatives and decisions taken in 1996-97, before the advent of Regional Chambers. RAYH, as it then was, had been taking its own steps toward greater inclusiveness at this time:

> We had grown that organisation [the early RAYH] to include a wider range of representatives, because we recognised that we weren't getting any representation, really, beyond the economic area, and we wanted some representation on social and environmental [issues]. So we added organisations to the original list, to work with us on developing proposals for a regional partnership.

Two issues are notable here: the importance of the initiative of a small group of individuals, and the development of proto-chambers through 'adding to the list'. Both these were common tendencies across the regions when the Chambers were being set up.

Even fewer formal votes take place on YHA than take place on SEERA. Only one formal vote has ever taken place; this was in the plenary of RAYH. Chamber officers are proud of this record, believing that it reflects a high level of regional consensus; it does not indicate that the Chamber transacts very little business. Together with the small size of the YHA plenary, this means that the line between full and non-full members in YHA is even more blurred than that in the South East. Non-full members may have equivalent influence in debates and passing of decisions to that of full members.

Inclusion through umbrella bodies

In Yorkshire and Humber, several umbrella bodies have been set up to engage with regional-level policy-making. One of the earliest was the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum, which was formed in 1996. This body represents the voluntary sector in the region: it has a very small paid staff. It elects one representative to YHA: this representative at present is

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[40] Yorkshire and Humber Assembly, Constitution, paragraphs 4-5: see www.yhassembly.gov.uk

[41] It should also be noted that the Learning and Skills Council seat and the Regional Cultural Consortium seat are held by the same individual.

also chair of the board of the Regional Forum (not a paid employee), and was elected unopposed.

YHA has given more limited resources so far to encourage members to improve accountability and reporting back to sectoral constituencies. An expanded programme is being developed, which will relate both to members of the plenary and of the five Commissions. Pressure has also come from the sectors themselves, in particular those, such as the environmental sector, which value new influence available to them through involvement in decision-making. An example of this phenomenon is YHA's environmental representation. At first, the single seat on RAYH for 'environmental interests' was held by an officer of the Environment Agency. It was felt by the wider sector—including many small voluntary organisations—that it was anomalous for an officer from a statutory body to represent the variety of groups within the environmental 'family', quite aside from the apparent conflict of interest in allowing membership to a statutory executive agency. This point was made very forcefully by a number of voluntary environmental groups. Although the EA representative did hold a series of feedback meetings, the person was inevitably constrained in their views due to their employment: this impression was heightened when CPRE audited the member's performance at meetings.

In response, a Regional Environmental Forum (REF) was set up in late 2000. It now has 23 members from a variety of NGOs, statutory and voluntary organisations. Its aim initially was to obtain a seat for environmental NGOs on the Chamber. However, the Assembly secretariat had itself come to the conclusion that representation of environmental interests via the Environment Agency was unsatisfactory. The opportunity of the merger was taken to reallocate the seat to a member to be elected by the REF. The Environment Agency itself has joined the REF and contributes as it sees fit: it also has observer status on YHA, alongside police, health authority and Government Office representatives.

The Yorkshire & Humber REF, as a new umbrella body, shares characteristics of the umbrella bodies in the South East. It has received £40,000 from YHA (a share of the Regional Chambers fund), £30,000 from Yorkshire Forward (the regional development agency) and £5,000 from GOYH (the Government Office for Yorkshire & Humberside). With this money it employs 1.5 staff, who act as a secretariat to the REF and who also write a Regional Environmental Enhancement Strategy. This strategy has no statutory force but acts as a policy document for the REF, with which they hope to influence RPG and the regional Sustainable Development Framework.

Other examples include the representative of rural interests, who was initially invited on to the Regional Chamber from the Yorkshire Rural Community Council (YRCC). This is one of two rural community councils in the region: the Humberside area has its own, but it is far smaller than the YRCC. This appointment was seen as the most immediate and appropriate way of involving the rural sector. Efforts were then made to create a constituency for the representative: biannual meetings were held, and regular reports put into the quarterly

YRCC newsletter. As with the South East, the newsletter is then subject to 'cascading' (discussed further below). Other members have less clear lines of accountability, reflecting smaller 'constituencies' and possibly a greater concern with outcomes than with process.

The individual members

The remarks made in the section above on the South East, about the age and ethnicity of social and economic partner members, apply also to Yorkshire and the Humber. Most SEP members were aged 35-55; few were women; and a substantial proportion held 'day' jobs which linked either directly or fairly closely with their representative role. Some were able to incorporate their work on behalf of the Assembly into their 'day' job as a result, and did so with approval from line managers.

Although YHA is a far smaller assembly than SEERA, similar dynamics were at work in YHA in that a core membership appeared to exist. The core membership revolves around the 10-strong Executive Committee. The degree of commitment of individual members depends upon the time they have available—which itself relates to their occupation outside of YHA and to their personal and/or professional commitment to the regional agenda, which grew from the degree to which they perceived its value in terms of influence on policy. One respondent stated that the practice of inclusiveness was daunting, as for many people their role on YHA "comes third or fourth on their list of day jobs."

A related issue is the degree to which progress on YHA is determined by the strength of individual relationships. As with local regeneration partnerships, the part-time and small-scale nature of YHA means that individual relationships assume a far greater importance. YHA has been subject to a similar level of turnover as SEERA: there are some partner representatives who have sat on the Regional Chamber in Yorkshire and the Humber since its inception, and some more recent additions. There has been slightly more turnover of local authority members due to local election results. This was noted as a problem, albeit relatively minor, by two respondents, because it interrupted existing personal links and meant that those links had to be rebuilt regularly. The perceived primacy of individual relationships is likely to be partially a consequence of the part-time membership.

Respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber tended to stress the role of expert knowledge over representativeness as being the chief added value that social and economic partners bring. This frequently linked in with claims that partners had been able to 'depoliticise' debate in the Assembly, and prevent business from being dominated by political points. One respondent stated that SEPs' value lay in:

> our ability to sit in the middle, [to] not be too politically driven and [to] say 'that's good for the region, that's not good for the region'…. We have proven in the last two years that by being at the top table, involving ourselves, helping to make decisions relating to the future of regional activities, that has had an impact…. It's because we don't have a particular axe to grind that we tend to take a broader view.

Communication between members and 'constituencies'

The cascading process takes place, in YHA, largely amongst the same types of members amongst whom it is most prominent in the South East. These are the environmental, voluntary, and rural sectors. They are the sectors most typified by large numbers of small organisations, who value umbrella organisations as means of achieving an influence over regional policy which has rarely been forthcoming in the past, and who therefore have the most to gain by developing a 'sectoral constituency' with the associated accountability and legitimacy. Umbrella bodies which can claim to represent, even if imperfectly, the voice of voluntary organisations within a region may thereby be able to wield considerable influence which was not available before their existence.

Examples of cascading in the YHA include the Yorkshire & Humber Regional Forum, which is "a network of networks". There are 300 member organisations, each of which receive regular e-mail communications and monthly newsletters from the Assembly representative. In turn, some of these members are themselves membership organisations. They in turn pass on information from YHA, and feed comments back from their members to the representative. Occasionally requests for information are received from the 'constituency', which, if they cannot be answered, are forwarded on to YHA staff. The Forum holds two conferences per year, consisting of plenary debates and subject workshops.

This research was not able to determine whether or not the means for consultation of sectoral constituencies are effective or not. By comparison with the local authority members (and with MPs and councillors in local authorities), however, the arrangements are likely to be effective. This is for the reasons stated above in the chapter on the South East. These constituencies are small, and consist of constituents who have a direct and professional interest in regional policy matters. They therefore have more time and inclination than the average member of the public to make their opinions known, and they also have more opportunity because of the regular consultation by e-mail.

Generally, the importance of communication to the Regional Chambers cannot be underestimated. Very few people are aware of the existence of Regional Chambers, let alone knowing what their role is. As Chambers have no executive powers and relatively small budgets, concerns of inclusiveness and equality are *comparatively* far more significant within them than within a more powerful regional government such as the National Assembly for Wales. A determination to include all parts of the regional community in policy-making can be a major plank of policy in a Regional Chamber.

Formal inclusion in YHA

Figure 6 shows the structure of committees and commissions in YHA.

Figure 5 : YHA Committee Structures

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │     Executive Committee      │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │           Plenary            │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
┌──────────────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Advanced Economy Commission   │─────│ Skilled & Flexible Workforce     │
│                                │     │ Commission                        │
└──────────────────────────────┘     └──────────────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Sustainability Commission      │─────│ Quality of Life Commission       │
└──────────────────────────────┘     └──────────────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Regional Transport Group (RAYH)│─────│ Robust Infrastructure Commission │
└──────────────────────────────┘     └──────────────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Planning Advisory Group (RAYH) │─────
└──────────────────────────────┘
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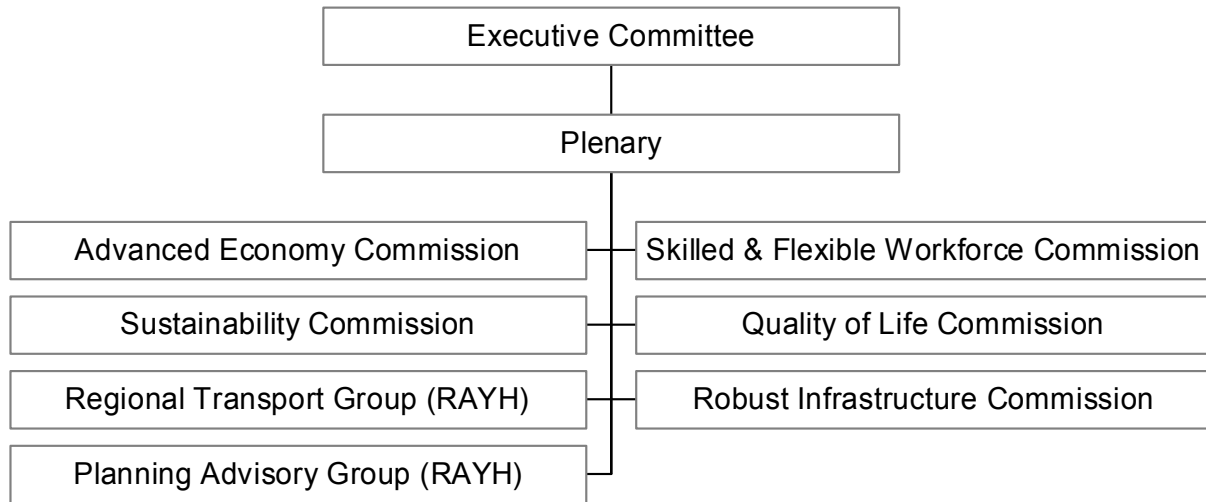
The five 'commissions' shown in the lower boxes in figure 6 were set up early on in the life of the previous Regional Assembly, RAYH. They matched five priority areas that had been identified in the region's Integrated Regional Strategy, *Advancing Together into the New Millennium*. This Strategy was developed in 1998, which was very early in comparison to the development of the regional agenda as a whole. It was negotiated with the Government Office and with various of the bodies which were about to become the Regional Development Agency, and it tasked specific organisations with achieving specific goals; hence it was a sufficiently concrete document to influence the shaping of RAYH's Commissions.

The Regional Transport Group and the Planning Advisory Group were sub-committees of RAYH. YHA is currently merging them with the Robust Infrastructure Commission. This will create a mega-commission with some 150 members which will then be 'trimmed'. Its final membership will be 40-50 strong, possibly including an executive-style steering group of around 10 members.

The small size of the YHA plenary — at only 35 members — makes it easier to simply involve all assembly members in matters such as planning, which in most other assemblies are necessarily delegated to a committee. Hence the formal structure of the Assembly is far simpler than that of SEERA. However, there was some concern that this was not the ideal structure for detailed consideration of policy by members, as expressed by one officer:

> I'm not sure how engaged you can be, with the current set of assembly members we have, in any detailed sense. I think in a high-level strategic sense [they can be effectively engaged], but that's not the level at which the work gets done…. [For example], in RPG there's a high level of interest on land-use matters, environmental matters. Well, the environment sector only has one seat on the assembly. You've then got two or three representatives from the education

sector. . You've got the churches. I'm not sure how much direct interest RPG has [for them].

As the plenary can meet only some six times per year, for a few hours at a time, members are pressured into considering high-level policy in very little detail. This was abetted by the fact that the 22 local authority representatives are leaders of their respective councils. Hence none hold a specialist portfolio (for instance, transport, or environment), with the associated problem identified in partnership literature: though possessing power to take decisions, they do not necessarily possess the appropriate expertise. By contrast, the officer quoted above identified the YHA commissions as the point at which 'the work gets done': "In the commissions, debates can be had about particular policies, particular initiatives, technical matters."

The potential for *actual* participation by SEPs, as opposed to mere presence, therefore may be more limited than the structure indicates. The YHA is, in this regard, an enabling organisation; members are not obliged to play full roles but will be enabled to should they wish to. However, it seems doubtful that current procedures could continue unchanged if all members wished to contribute on every topic. Detailed debate within the plenary of YHA is relatively rare: substantial officer input and recommendations constitute a considerable amount of the driving force behind YHA's progress. The writer was present at the YHA's July 2002 plenary, where a political discussion arose relating to the Regional Government White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*. Strenuous efforts were made by the chair and other members to quell the disagreements with promises of further development of circulated papers on the White Paper.

Two respondents mentioned the role of the Executive Committee, which has ten members, and appears to be a more focused and forceful body than its 27-strong counterpart in the South East. The Executive Committee was perceived as being an important means of ensuring the inclusion of partner voices in the overall direction of the assembly. The partners are entitled to four seats on the Executive Committee: one goes directly to the YHA vice-chair, who must be a partner, and three others are elected by the partners from amongst themselves.

Informal inclusion

YHA supplements its small full membership with the five Commissions shown in Figure 5. These Commissions were explicitly set up to increase inclusiveness alongside the limited membership of the plenary Chamber. Each contains up to 40-50 members, drawn both from YHA itself and invited from outside on the basis of expertise (thus resembling SEERA's advisory groups). Unlike in SEERA, however, these commissions report to the YHA plenary, not via the planning committee. Their total membership extends to some 200 organisations. There are no rules of proportionality. Local authority members or officers make up a minority on all five.

Some of the SEP members, or their organisations, are also represented on the commissions. Members of the commissions are not considered to have a representative role: like their counterparts on SEERA they are a top-down model of inclusion, chosen for their knowledge and usefulness to the Assembly. Efforts are made to ensure that the commissions represent all points of view: no sectors are excluded because of unwelcome views. Membership is fluid: in effect, everybody on a slowly-expanding list is invited to Commission meetings, but not all regularly turn up.

The commissions clearly resemble SEERA's advisory groups in their structure. They are not as clearly a top-down form of inclusion as SEERA's groups, as they were not set up with the explicit remit of advising on planning matters, but are tasked with wider discussions and recommendations.

YHA has appointed three new policy managers to drive forward changes in the influence and role of the Commissions. Latterly, although each Commission has had a work programme, links between them and the YHA plenary have been very thin. The Commissions have in effect reported to officers: hence their contribution to policy-making has been somewhat stilted. Each of the Commissions will also have a small executive, with responsibility to drive forward the commission's work programme. Up till now their work has been largely reactive: for instance, the Robust Infrastructure Commission has been concerned with producing RPG, and the Advanced Economy Commission with monitoring the Regional Economic Development Strategy.

Two development officers will be appointed to keep the membership under review, invite extra members where the Commissions are seen to be lacking, or to obtain the correct *individual* from a given organisation that is represented. It is hoped to obtain a clearer pattern of representation: for example, a given sector which is represented on the YHA plenary should also be represented on each Commission, so that the sector can harmonise its views and thus maximise its influence.

One officer stated that the majority of detailed work was carried out in the Commissions: in a similar role to the advisory groups of SEERA, these bodies produced detailed recommendations to be passed to the plenary assembly. However, elected members are permitted to, and do, serve on the Commissions: there are aims to increase the contribution of elected members to the commissions.

Inclusion and size

The issue of size has already been raised in the context of inclusiveness, with a suggestion implicit that, in order to be inclusive, Chambers ought to be larger rather than smaller. This would be justifiable if the work of Chambers took place solely through their members in plenary sessions. However, one of the findings of this research is that that is not the case: indeed, the truth is the reverse. Most of the fundamental work of the Chambers, including

the two case-studies, takes place outside plenary debates: either in committee discussions, or through officers.

One officer suggested that the YHA plenary was a very poor occasion in which to try to hold debates. However, this was taken as an accepted fact: it was related as much to the part-time nature of the assembly membership as to the size. Part-time, unpaid members, meeting six times per year, are likely to be reliant upon briefings produced by the YHA. And agendas are typically tight, with no time available for extended debate.

Groups outside inclusion structures

The smaller size of the YHA membership suggests that inclusion would be less comprehensive than in the South East. The large commissions obviate this problem to a certain extent. Nevertheless, overall perceptions of inclusiveness correlate considerably with those in the South East. Many of the concerns about excluded groups found in the South East were shared in Yorkshire and Humber, though they take slightly different form. The opinion of respondents was that the spread of representation on YHA was approximately right.

In this regard, respondents' views on which groups still remained to be included more effectively were notable. None believed that social, environmental, or economic groups still suffered from being left out. In many cases these groups have spent years campaigning 'from the outside' for policy change, and respond enthusiastically to invitations to the 'inside'.

The research found far less concern than was evident in SEERA that business had not become properly engaged in regional activities. Business representatives have three seats on YHA: one of these is dedicated to the Federation of Small Businesses, expanding representation from the CBI and Chamber of Commerce. Business interests are also represented by the LSC representative, who is also vice-chair of YHA, and who runs a venture capital company in his 'day job'. The Chamber of Commerce representative chairs a Commission, and the CBI representative chaired the first YHA scrutiny panel.

Two respondents were sceptical of the degree to which business had been engaged. Both stated that, whilst formally obtaining business representation on the Assembly was straightforward, representatives often came from umbrella organisations like the CBI or Institute of Directors, or the Federation of Small Businesses. These bodies were felt to have only a limited 'constituency'. The representatives were also typically not 'practising' businesspeople, who, it was believed, would not have the time to take part in regional meetings. It was supposed that representatives, as opposed to practitioners, would be less in touch with business's views and needs. At the same time, there was a feeling that the business representatives had not contributed as much as they might have: in part this was attributed to a strong aversion to styles of operation that resemble local government, as with the South East.

Greater concerns were the enhancement of representation of black and minority ethnic groups, elderly, and youth. At the time of the research, efforts were being made to appoint a BME representative to a seat on the assembly: these had been hampered due to the fragmentation of BME community organisations in the region. Both Chambers studied had had difficulty finding appropriate representatives from the fragmented BME 'sector'. It is striking that Chambers interpret 'inclusiveness' as stretching beyond partner organisations to all sectors of the community. By contrast, there was a general sense that the representation of the partners was adequate, with the system designed to take on as many organisations as wanted a voice.

The effects of equality of membership

Partner respondents on YHA were not as overwhelmingly positive about equality of membership as those on SEERA. However, this can mostly be attributed to the delays leading up to the merger in October 2001. Since then it appears that partners have been content that they have been included as full members of the Chamber. The vice-chairship of the assembly is reserved to a member of the partners' group: partners cannot stand for the chairship itself. The Executive Committee is also constructed by proportionality: six seats are reserved to local authority members and four to partners.

Partner respondents also strongly inclined to the view that local authority representatives tended to speak on parochial issues. This had almost the status of an article of faith. The degree to which local authority representatives could 'think regionally', according to partners, depended upon the individual representative. However, most partners believed (as with many in the South East) that the experience of joint working in YHA had lessened the identified tendency towards parochial, highly politicised interventions:

> I think that the real value of the SEPs is mixing local authority people with the sort of people they don't normally talk to or meet up with…. It's a huge education to a lot of the local authority people that there are people out there with an agenda who are doing it because they want to do it, not because they want a political place. They [local authority members] have been able to see that you can actually find solutions without falling out, and you don't have to politicise every single issue.

Money

The £15m Regional Chambers fund, announced in March 2001, was believed to have had a significant effect by all partner respondents in YHA. The fund has permitted Chambers to build up an independent, full-time secretariat. Previously they had relied upon the largesse of individual local authorities and officers, to give time and meeting space to allow the Chambers to function. This in itself had created an imbalance, both symbolic and actual, between the local authority and partner members: despite the Government's intentions for Regional Chambers, the impression given was that Regional Chambers were essentially local-authority led with partners admitted due to the *largesse* of the local authorities.

These feelings were compounded by the fact that local authorities were (and still are) paying subscriptions to the Regional Chambers, whilst partner organisations never have. Early attempts were made to oblige partner members to pay subscriptions in some regions, but these were abandoned after the Government indicated that it did not wish to see partners excluded because of inability to pay subscriptions. (Subscriptions are typically in the thousands to ten-thousands of pounds in size; approximately three-quarters of this represents regional planning allocations. If legislative time allows, these will be paid direct to Regional Chambers from April 2003.) The lack of partner subscriptions still causes minor dissent occasionally, and may be a factor in the refusal of three Chambers (East and West Midlands, and East of England) to permit partners a full vote on planning matters.

Two respondents from Yorkshire & Humber stated that the arrival of the Regional Chambers fund had ended disagreements over money. As the Chamber was no longer short of money, there was no pressure on partners to contribute. Greater equality was the reality as well as the aspiration.

Attitudes of members

Most partners on YHA felt that they were included as full partners by the local authority members. This had been longer coming than in SEERA. It seemed that full inclusion really dated only from the merger of October 2001. Before that, it had been uncertain where power really lay. Though the Regional Chamber was in theory the body to be consulted by the RDA, Yorkshire Forward, in practice most power and money rested with RAYH. Therefore, inclusiveness on the previous Regional Chamber was of limited significance. Most vitally, before merger the partners had not been able to vote on planning matters; now, they can. An association of local authorities has continued to exist post-merger, but its power has been diluted.

One respondent in particular was critical of the failure of local authority members to engage with partners before the merger. For this respondent, local authorities appeared to regard the partners as an irrelevance, and were often very unwilling to take part in debates—which led to debates being dominated by partner representatives. This point was rarely made, however, contrasting with responses to Shaw *et al* in their survey of the North-East Assembly, where the following point was commonly made:

> We've got to change the top-down style of decision-making. Partners should be involved in the initiation stage of decision-making. At present partners are only involved when a policy is set in stone.[42]

YHA has also gone through a similar process to SEERA in terms of the actual selection of its partner members. The former Regional Chamber, when it was set up, made efforts at drawing in partners from various organisations from across the region. In practice,

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[42] Shaw *et al*, op. cit., p.17

representatives from regional organisations were appointed on the basis of ability to commit their time. Though the Chamber did ensure a variety of representation, there was little attempt to use any form of election or electoral college.

Two respondents believed that the SEPs did not uniformly function as a bloc. Despite being united to some degree by the common interest of not being local politicians, and in having their own pre-meetings and relationships with the YHA secretariat, there was also some feeling of a divide similar to the one which is formalised in the South East, between 'economic' and 'social/environmental' partners: one respondent claimed "the rural community, the voluntary bodies, environment, we tend to stick together. Then the business element sticks together."

Individual officers were praised for their efforts, early on, to include social and economic partners. To some extent, the knowledge that the legitimacy of the Chambers in the eyes of the Government depended on inclusiveness aided this. Nevertheless, the routine practice of inclusiveness was vital. One officer in YHA in particular was singled out by two respondents:

> A lot of it is down to her. She's been absolutely brilliant from the very beginning, very inclusive…. She's been extraordinarily good at pulling together—'oh you are coming, you have done this, you will be all right…oh go on, do this'—very much a personal thing. And [this was important] particularly at the beginning, when a lot of us thought it was a good idea but didn't quite know why we were there.

Conclusions

The way ahead for inclusion

The two Regional Chambers used as case studies in this research have practised inclusion effectively in a number of ways. Their record indicates that lessons have been learned, albeit indirectly, from the experiences of local partnerships through the 1990s. In structural terms, there is much to commend in the progress of both YHA and SEERA.

There has been little prior research on the forms that inclusion takes in the Regional Chambers. However, a number of observations can be made about the process. These come with a health warning: they relate solely to the two Chambers that have been studied and are not necessarily generalisable. It is also important to note that none of the Chambers are finished articles: they are still developing, growing capacity through their central government funding, and adopting a critical stance to their own performance. However, this report points towards some phenomena which may be observable in other regions when efforts towards inclusiveness are made.

1. The two Chambers studied are very reliant on the flexibility and commitment of certain individuals to function effectively. Many partners who sat as Chamber members did so by virtue of flexible working arrangements in their 'day job', and many were appointed largely through being present and willing to undertake the job. This is a similar pattern to that found in regeneration partnerships. These people are 'core members': their characters and inclinations exert considerable influence over the direction of the Chamber, distinct from their roles as representatives. Relationships between them, similarly, are fundamental in the actual progress of Chamber business.
   This point was also raised by Shaw *et al* in relation to the North-East. Whereas electoral colleges and partners' seats may permit a wider range of representatives on the Chamber membership, inclusiveness is diluted if a small group of those individuals takes charge of the Chamber.
   It is very difficult to research the impact of regional stakeholders as a whole (i.e. those outside the Assembly membership) on Chamber policy, because they contribute through personal or electronic contacts. But it is perhaps inevitable that, in quasi-governmental structures of this kind, opportunities exist for control of power by small groups—although there is nothing in the current research to suggest that this happens now.
2. The structures through which partners are enabled to be included within Regional Chambers have implications about the purpose of the partner organisations. Fundamentally, are the partners expected to contribute only in their area of expertise or to feed in on all regional debates if they so choose? If partners want to, or should, contribute mainly as experts, this points towards their contributions being concentrated in advisory groups or commissions—in other words, subject committees of some form; and conversely, it points towards a smaller presence on the plenary assembly. This research indicates that partners generally choose to contribute only on their area of expertise. In practice most partners find that most regional

policies have implications for their 'subject' and thus contribute fairly frequently. The joint approach under development in Yorkshire and Humber appears to be a logical response to this dual concern: partner members will be able to contribute at both levels and will be supported in building their capacity to do so.

Most partners in practice see their representative role and their communication of expertise as one and the same. That view is facilitated by the nature of partners' constituencies. Their constituents are their constituents because they share the partner representatives' expert knowledge and interest; thus to represent their constituents' views *is* to influence regional policy via their expertise.

There are strong parallels between the partner members and members of the House of Lords. Peers sit part-time, rarely contribute on subjects that they are not expert upon, and are welcomed by many commentators for providing a more civilised and knowledgeable source of debate than that of the House of Commons. Peers also have the ability to speak or vote on any matter of government, though they frequently choose not to.

Most partners interviewed were strongly of the opinion that the value of their role lay in their ability to contribute to the business of the Regional Chambers at all levels. In this regard, many were very sceptical about the range of proposals in the White Paper on elected regional government. Strength of feeling ran high: words such as "an insult" and "a retrograde step" were used by respondents. The various proposals - a civic forum or forums, co-option on to scrutiny committees, or use of partners as policy advisors - were all regarded as a downgrading of the partners' role. Perhaps surprisingly, strength of feeling on this issue was equal in both regions studied, although Yorkshire and Humber is likely to obtain an elected assembly far earlier than the South-East."

3.   The multiple points of access offered to social and economic partners are valuable. The informality of the policy-making process, by comparison with central or devolved government, is striking. There was no impropriety in members referring questions on policy directly to Chamber staff, or in partner members sitting with elected councillors on one type of committee and officers on another. There is no confinement of inclusiveness to particular arenas.

4.   A pivotal idea of local regeneration partnerships was that of 'signing-up' or 'ownership', as stated in the Introduction. This theory would need modification to be applied to Regional Chambers. In Chambers, there is no prize of significant funding, and many of the strategies signed up to have an unclear legal status. But several respondents mentioned 'regional ownership' as a justification for the presence of partners. Certainly agreement of this kind is preferable to discord, but it is not clear what *practical* benefits derive from regional ownership. Regional Chambers are not obliged to deliver anything, and the Chambers are voluntary. Hence Chambers cannot take decisions that are binding upon their members. One respondent stated that his organisation would be obliged to campaign against certain airport expansion plans, even if they were agreed by the Chamber.

One officer stated that some means of enforcing RPG—for instance, a right for YHA to comment on large development plans and to recommend their dis-approval—was necessary. This person stated:

If one's working within an elected organisation…. We have a map to know how to resolve conflict, and to take decisions that are binding.

However, in a Regional Chamber no such 'map' exists. And this is complicated by the tendency of Chambers to avoid controversial matters and to seek consensus at every opportunity. The author witnessed this tendency at the YHA's annual general meeting in July 2002, where strenuous efforts were made to prevent a discussion on the YHA's response to the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice*, becoming heated.

Ownership has other more practical uses, however, as expressed by another officer:

> A number of the partners who we involve in our work, if you were to consciously exclude them from the process…might want to come up to the public examination of RPG and object to everything in it…. By incorporating them in the actual working…[we are] trying to see if some consensus can be achieved that can take on board their concerns.

5. The Chambers studied have made a success of using ICT for communication and discussion, perhaps more so than many other parts of government. E-mail groups are, by necessity, used as the fundamental means of inclusion of a wider group of stakeholders than is available for membership. This has been a commendable, and organic, development. There is another aspect to good communications, however. Chambers aim to exercise regional influence, and influence comes through awareness of their existence and role. Communicating their existence, purpose, and priorities is therefore a priority for the Regional Chambers. SEERA in particular has prioritised communicating its existence and basic information (business, meeting dates, documents) to as great a degree as possible. Making information available is regarded as a vital part of inclusiveness.

6. Symbolic steps away from local government practice have been found to be valuable means of convincing partner members of the seriousness of inclusion. These include using non-local government venues for meetings; moving away from local government terminology in constitutional and procedural documents; and preventing delay of debates through tactics derived from local government. The two Chambers studied have made good progress in this stepping-away, and other Chambers should consider adopting their practices.

7. It was noted in the introduction that the lack of funding available to Regional Chambers might reduce the incentive to create working partnerships. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case: the Chambers studied function very effectively as partnerships. It appears on the face of it that opposition to the involvement of non-directly-elected representatives is ebbing away. However, given that Chambers have no delivery powers, very little money, and that their strategies are very long-term and rely to a significant extent on central government funding and co-operation, it is possible that local authority members are willing to accept social and economic partners precisely because they are not being asked to give up control over any significant policy areas. With the exception of Regional Planning Guidance—the significance of which is not yet evident—there is little to play for in Regional Chambers. Members of elected regional assemblies, with budgetary and executive powers, are unlikely to be ready

to give up their power so easily.

The limited powers of the Chambers may also ease the various constitutional oddities: the appointment of members to advisory groups on the basis of expertise is an example. Bridges *et al* report that similar processes on RDA advisory groups created considerable disquiet.[43] RDAs have much spending power; hence whether or not an organisation is included in decision-making is a much more salient issue.

Resources are key to the inclusion of social and economic partners. An enormous difference in effectiveness can be made by paying for a single person as secretarial support to a partner grouping. This is a similar conclusion to that drawn by literature on regeneration partnerships; the effect of the support was disproportionately greater than the expenditure on it.

8. Many partner respondents implied that procedures and debates in Regional Chambers marked something of a 'different kind of politics'. Partners had refused to accept political point-scoring and rhetoric as inevitable components of policy-making, and those tendencies had now been reduced. However, this must be seen in the context of Chambers' limited responsibilities, and of the need to reach consensus on significant issues. Besides, some of the research in SEERA in particular indicates that partners were not unwilling to take part in political processes. Rather, they wanted to be part of political processes in which they were treated as equals and in which time was not wasted.

There are a variety of ways in which the inclusiveness of both assemblies could be improved:

1. Some expenses allowances are in place in both SEERA and YHA, but these are patchy in their coverage. Consideration could be given to extending expenses and/or attendance allowances to all members.

2. An 'expertise inventory' could be taken, from both partners and local authority members. This would help members and officers in balancing the membership of committees and task groups.

3. Processes of scrutiny are beginning to be practised across all eight regions. As some respondents in SEERA recognised, scrutiny can give members who are not centrally involved in Chamber administration an opportunity to investigate matters of interest to themselves or their constituents.

4. The issue of size and forms of representation could be reviewed. The evidence of this report suggests that the justification for a very large full chamber membership is not convincing. Mere membership of a regional chamber is not a means to achieving inclusiveness without the active involvement of those members. Likewise, full membership is not essential for partners to be able to make contributions to Chamber business: for instance, they could merely sit on themed sub-groups relating to their expertise.

The issue of size was brought up by some of the respondents in the South-East who objected to the perceived 'downgrading' of their role proposed by the Government's White Paper on regional assemblies. Most suggested that 25-35 members were insufficient to represent the South-East's 8 million people, and pointed to SEERA's large size and diversity as a better model

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[43] See Bridges *et al*, 2001, p. 19

of regional government. Whilst arguments can be made for elected assemblies having more members, it is not clear that the current arrangements promote diversity in more than a symbolic fashion. Having a wide range of members is only valuable if those members all contribute to Chamber business.

On the other hand the very small membership of YHA may bring its own problems, in that most partner constituencies have only one representative on the full assembly, leading either to a limited opportunity to contribute or to that person being continually obliged to stand up for their own sector's interests to the exclusion of other issues. What is more promising is a dual approach with inclusion taking place both at plenary and commission level of the kind underway in YHA.

5. Stronger action could be taken on supporting sectoral constituencies and duties of reporting back to them, particularly on those members who have so far shown less enthusiasm for duties of representation and accountability.

Otherwise, all Chambers could be encouraged to follow the lead of the South East and Yorkshire and Humber on 'cascading', full voting rights, greater use of committees, and encouragement of sectoral constituencies. For the latter, introduction of funding from sources that are not time-limited would be helpful. Due to the limited responsibilities available to Regional Chambers, recommendations such as these will be able to have only a limited effect. But in the context of the powers of the Chambers they can improve performance significantly.

The general trend, in SEERA, YHA and elsewhere, has been away from permitting full membership to statutory representatives. This has coincided with the gradual growth of Chambers into bodies capable of writing and discussing regional strategies inclusively.

While Chamber members are part time, inclusiveness will function in a different manner to conceptions of inclusiveness in a democratic framework. Direct communication between officers and members of sectoral constituencies, for instance, makes sense given the small scale of Chamber operations. This form of inclusiveness could be described as formalised lobbying rather than a distinct constitutional system. This emphasises the voluntary and small-scale character of the Regional Chambers, and shows that the findings of this report should be seen in the context of the regional structures and not generalised across to regional government as a whole.

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Glossary of acronyms

Acronym	Description
BME	Black and minority ethnic communities
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (1997–2001)
DTLR	Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (2001–2002)
GOSE	Government Office for the South East
GOYH	Government Office for Yorkshire & Humberside
ICT	Information and communication technology
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSPs	Local Strategic Partnerships
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002–)
RAISE	Regional Action and Involvement South East
RAYH	Regional Assembly for Yorkshire & Humberside (1996–2001)
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RPB	Regional Planning Body
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance
SCEALA	Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency
SEEPS	South East Economic Partnerships
SEERA	South East England Regional Assembly
SEFS	South East Forum for Sustainability
SEPs	Social and Economic Partners
SERF	South East Regional Forum
SERPLAN	South East Regional Planning Body
TECs	Training and Enterprise Councils
TUC	Trades Union Congress
YHA	Yorkshire & Humber Assembly (2001–)