

Identity, Diversity and Political Engagement in the Regions

by

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Introduction

In the discussion of political democracy in Europe, nation states have been awarded a central role both in the study of political institutions and policy making and in terms of peoples' identity and commitment. More recently, multi-level governance has become a powerful concept in the understanding of political and policy roles performed by institutions and the important role of 'regions'. Such institutional analysis, particularly where it deals with structures of 'governance', tends to focus upon political, economic and social elites while non-elites are too often seen as of secondary importance. Yet political legitimacy ultimately depends upon some concordance between the views of elites and non-elites. In this paper we explore political identities as they are perceived by non-elites in our international comparative empirical study, including their perceptions of their regional, ethnic, cultural, national and European identities. We are particularly interested in the relationships between different types of actors representing different ethnic, religious and cultural groups and any differences in their engagement with political processes.

The Nation State

The nation state has been the form of political organisation most commonly sought and successfully established since the nineteenth century in Europe, when industrial economies and political democracy also developed. The nation state became the embodiment of power for the people as old kingdoms and empires declined and its supreme authority within its territory was accepted. More recently, it has been reasserted to some extent in Eastern Europe given the collapse of Marxist socialism which had tended to suppress national identity. Preoccupation with the nation state has been reflected in extensive academic scholarship from the writings of Weber (1947, 1961) and Hobhouse (1951, 1978) to recent times (E.Gellner (1983), D.Beetham (1984), S. Hall (1984), A. D. Smith (1995), M.Guibernau (1996) and many more). The idea of a single pervasive 'national' identity may be used to justify and reinforce the legitimacy of existing states, strengthening their authority (Schopflin, 1997). It emphasises the national factor both in relation to the world order and in ensuring internal unity, but in the process it may ignore or minimise the multiple identities of communities which exist within the state, including those of the religion and ethnicity of immigrant groups.

However, in a globalised world the ubiquity of power of the nation state has been challenged both from above and below (Keating 1999). The role of the nation state is mediated and moderated from above by international elements and agreements as well as by regional ones like the European Union. The EU has become a key player for its member states. Monnet's incremental, neo-functionalist approach (Rosamond, 2000) has led the EU member nations to develop co-operation through a system of "liberal-intergovernmentalism" (Moravscik, 1998). The growth and multiplicity of EU functions

and the increasing importance of EU law in influencing and limiting nation state law, has prompted the development of proposals for an EU Constitution. Whilst the Constitution per se was rejected by France and the Netherlands in referenda, the Lisbon (2008) Agreement will institute many of the same proposals.

Multilevel Governance

Within nation states there have been attempts to encourage a move from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ (Rhodes 1997, Kooiman, 1993). ‘Governance’ is a somewhat loose term. Rhodes (Rhodes, R.A.W. 1996) argues that it has at least six different meanings in contemporary social science. It might be said to be capable of conveying all the meanings not covered by the traditional term ‘government’. In its simplest form it has been defined as referring to “the use of legitimate authority exercised in the application of government power and in the management of public affairs...It is embodied in institutional arrangements, consultative mechanisms, policy making processes and the nature and style of leadership in a political system” (Healey and Robinson, 1992). “Governance – that is, the control of an activity by some means such that a range of desired outcomes is achieved – is, however, not just the province of the state. Rather it is a function that can be performed by a wide variety of public and private, state and non-state, national and international institutions and practices”(Hirst and Thompson, 1996). A similar discussion has occurred in relation to the EU (Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999). When the European Commission launched a debate in July 2001 on how the EU was to be run it used the term ‘governance’ (European Commission. 2001). The aim was to adopt new governmental systems to bring the EU closer to ordinary people, making it more effective and reinforcing democracy in Europe and thus consolidating the legitimacy of European institutions.

Governance within the nation state is to be understood as much more ‘bottom-up’ than ‘top-down’. This may mean wider powers for democratically elected local and regional government within the state. However, the term also “points to the fact that ‘governing’ usually involves a range of ‘actors’ wider than elected representatives or appointed officials and includes various kinds of groups clustered around a particular policy sector” (Loughlin, 2007), which Loughlin refers to as “Sectoral Policy Communities” (Loughlin, 2007). Where governance refers to regions there may also be “Territorial Policy Communities” (Loughlin, 2007) which might include representatives of both territorial and non-territorially defined ethnic groups. Hirst and Thompson argue that as a result: “nation states should be seen no longer as ‘governing’ powers, able to impose outcomes on all dimensions of policy within a given territory by their own authority, but as loci from which forms of governance can be proposed. Nation states are now simply one class of powers and political agencies in a complex system of power from world to local levels”. However, the nation state remains central to the process because “populations remain territorial and subject to the citizenship of the national state.... non- governmental agencies are not governments, but many of them play crucial roles of governance” (Hirst and Thompson, 1996, page 190).

The move towards governance has resulted in the possibility of greater participation by numerous non-governmental agencies within civil society. Rhodes (1996) refers to these as “self-organising, inter organisational networks”. How engaging governance is will depend upon the nature of the networks and of the actors operating within them. The structures of governance may well tend to focus upon political, economic and social elites to the detriment of non-elites. Yet political legitimacy ultimately must depend upon there being some concordance between the views and actions of elites and non-elites.

Regions

“Region” is a term which has several different meanings. One meaning refers to a wide geographic area or one with certain geographic characteristics— both the European continent and the alpine area of Europe can be described as regions, one of the world and the other within Europe. But another significant meaning relates to regions within a nation state which may have features distinctive from their neighbours or from the national mainstream or majority. Such differences may be cultural, in language, or religion, or reflect experience of a past history in which it may have belonged to another state or been part of an empire. These features may serve to emphasize a perceived identity which is at least partly different from that of the majority in the state. Keating (1998) draws attention to the political manifestations of regionalist movements, for example aiming to preserve the features and cultures of long standing communities, or to support the nationalist separatist aims of the region. Scotland and Wales in the UK, Brittany and Corsica in France, Catalonia and the Basque country in Spain are examples of regions where there are regional political parties and activities. In these and other countries, regional government has been restructured to decentralise authority and give some degree of autonomy. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 is said to have “enshrined the principles of state unity, regional autonomy and interregional solidarity” (Wagstaff 1994). The important principle of ‘subsidiarity’ which postulates that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen, appears in the European Charter of Local Self Government of 1985 and was set out in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and in Article 9 of the Draft Constitution. In summary, “the region is a sui generis form of non-sovereign authority, filling a gap which the nation state cannot fill” (Hopkins, 2002).

The impetus to regional government has also come from policies for economic growth in regional areas which are centres for growth and development, often with key cities which attract foreign investment and migration from both within and outside the country (Allen et al 1998). Other regions which are in economic decline may receive funds for development from their national governments or from the European Union. Laffan (2004) points out that “(the) new forms of structural and regional policy are frequently designed as a combination of top-down supranational and national planning and coordination and the bottom-up animation of indigenous actors” and “(the) increasing significance of regional interventions is related to a search for competitive advantage in an increasingly important world.” Transnational regional associations are also appearing, for example in the neighbouring alpine regions of Italy and Austria, and in the contiguous area of

Saarland, Luxemburg and Lorraine, and a European Learning Network of Enterprise in deprived urban areas was set up in 2004 by 5 cities in different countries (Holmes 2005).

The European Union has been an important part of this impetus. Its Committee of the Regions was set up in 1994 with representatives of regional and local government from each member state. It must be consulted by the European Commission, Council and Parliament when proposals for a wide range of policies are made, as for example on economic, environmental and social policies. Many regions now have their own offices in Brussels, and many “see greater autonomy within the nation state and influence within Europe as their goals.” (Hopkins 2002). Loughlin and Keating (1997) argue that while “we are not witnessing the emergence of a ‘Europe of the Regions’, what is striking is ...the importance of the subnational level in terms of both policy making and practice (page 157), ... Furthermore, with ... the withdrawal of the state in areas such as regional policy, regions have been left to fend for themselves in a situation of competitive regionalism”.

Political and Cultural territories

Within any nation state one typically finds some territorial distinctions. The term 'territorial communities' is sometimes used. "Territorial communities are spatial political entities that exist on the basis of either official recognition within the constitutional, institutional or policy infrastructure of states / multi-state collectives (like the European Union), or adherence to their existence by groups or populations residing in them. Territorial communities may thus be constructed on the basis of either single sources of identity (i.e. they exist as a result of either official recognition or self-generation by their indigenous populations) or multiple sources of identity (i.e. they exist as a result of both official recognition and self-generation by their indigenous populations)" (Hunter, J. 2004). Keating (1998) perceives a recent change to be that: “Regions are seen ... as social constructions within territorial boundaries ", and..... it is no longer enough to say... that ‘we are from here’. Now ‘here’ must be defined by reference to a ‘there’". He sees three elements to regionalism in terms of political action. The first is cognitive – people must be aware of the region, its geographical limits and its characteristics. The second is affective – how they feel about it and the extent to which it provides a framework for common identity. The third element is instrumental – that it can be used as the basis for collective action. Keating argues that regional identity like national identity requires “citizens to relate to people whom they only know at second hand” (Keating 1998). Both are therefore ‘imagined communities’ in Anderson’s sense (Anderson 1983).

Care must be taken with some territorial communities in making assumptions about their relation to 'suppressed national cultures'. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) argue forcefully that such regional or subnational cultures and identities may actually consist of 'invented traditions' rather than having any actual historical reality. 'Invented tradition ', they argue, "is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past." They distinguish between 'tradition' and 'custom' which, they argue, dominates traditional

societies, in that the "object and characterisation of 'traditions', including invented ones, is invariance", whereas custom in traditional societies "does not preclude innovation and change up to a point". Hobsbawm, as a Marxist, is interested in stressing the functions that such subjective histories have for the dominant centrist power. However, even where regional identities and devolved authority now derive from such subnational or regional identities, those identities are still based often upon subjective interpretations of history. Weber makes the same point about 'ethnic minority' groups. What binds them together is shared subjective belief rather than any necessary historical reality. Trevor-Roper (1983) illustrates the case with reference to Scottish culture. "Wherever Scotchmen (sic) gather together to celebrate their national identity, they assert it openly by certain distinctive national apparatus. They wear the kilt . . . and if they indulge in music, their instrument is the bagpipe. This apparatus, to which they ascribe great antiquity, is in fact largely modern. . . Indeed, the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention" (Trevor-Roper 1983). A similar case is made for Wales by Morgan: "The historical revival and the invention of tradition had an effect on Wales more far reaching than anything in England, though it did resemble what was happening in small European countries. Wales in the eighteenth century did not have an unbroken or a fortunate historical tradition, it did not have a glorious or heroic recent past. Hence the discovery of a remote past, the Druids and the Celts and others, had an astonishing effect upon the Welsh." (Morgan 1983).

Regional Identity and Diversity

In a recent study (Smith & Wistrich 2007) we conducted research on multiple identities in three regions in three EU nation states. These were: Wales in Britain, Flanders in Belgium and Silesia in Poland. All possess distinctive 'regional' identities, based on language, culture and 'past history' from which political identities derive. As well as 'territorially defined minorities' we also studied other ethnic minorities resident within the region but whose ethnicity is historically associated with elsewhere. The study used focus group methodology studying non-elite participants. It raises interesting questions about democracy and legitimacy within the nation state and sub-national institutions.

The material in this project was collected through the development of 'focus' groups (Smith 2007). The use of focus groups allowed us to try to understand both the attitudes and opinions of each group studied and also how those views were constructed, how robustly they were upheld in debate, and how they related to possible resolutions. In each region, within each country, respondents were selected on the basis of their perceived cultural / ethnic identities and, as far as possible, balanced for age and gender. At least three groups were identified for each regional case study. One group constituted the predominant ethnic or cultural group within the region, and the others were minorities within the society and residing in the region. Ideally, one group would represent the majority group within the larger nation state. The data produced had to be qualitative data of a high order in a form which was amenable to international comparisons being made. Wherever appropriate and possible, findings were compared with other published material and statistical evidence.

The actual groups selected were as follows. In Wales, we selected four distinct groups: the majority English speaking Welsh, the Welsh speaking Welsh, the English in-comers and the local Pakistani community. In Flanders, we also identified four groups for study: the majority Flemish and the Turkish, Moroccan and sub-Saharan African minority communities. The Flemish is a majority group both within Flanders and within Belgium as a whole. In Silesia we identified three distinct groups: the majority Polish, the ‘Silesians’, and the German ethnic community within Silesia. Whilst Poland as a whole is just beginning to experience a degree of inward migration from elsewhere in Eastern Europe, there were no significant existing ethnic minorities who were resident other than the long standing German minority.

Local and regional identities

One of the key findings of this study was that the strongest identification for all peoples within the regions, whether of the regional majority or the national majority of the nation state, was with their local community. This local community might be centred around cultural and social organisations, religious or ethnic associations or even the local pub, but in all cases it predominated. Regional identity was next in importance for the Welsh, Silesians and Flemish, each of whom represent the main regional identity group within the territorial region. Ethnic minorities living in two of the three regions were found to share these regional identities – the Germans in Silesia and the Pakistanis in Wales. In Flanders, Moroccans had integrated well into local Flemish society, but felt excluded by extreme nationalistic activities like those of the Vlaams Belang (the extreme Flemish nationalist party). Consequently, they found it easier to identify themselves as Belgian rather than Flemish because the term ‘Belgian’ did not impact too strongly upon their other identities. They also identified more strongly with being Muslim than Moroccan. Turks tended to use the terms Flemish and Belgian interchangeably, but appeared to see themselves as more Flemish than Belgian, especially when abroad, and most appeared to have more Flemish than Turkish friends and associates. However, their primary identification was with Turkey, and even more so with their village of family origin within Turkey. Sub-Saharan Africans in Flanders had no strong identity with either the region or the nation. French is the colonial language of the Sub-Sahara, but, despite their good French and their perceived exclusion by the Flemish, the Sub-Saharanans appeared to have little identification with Belgium. Their overriding identification was with being ‘black’.

National identity was felt with any strength only by people of the national majority living in the regions i.e.: the English incomers in Wales (though they suffered confusion between English and British identity) and the Poles in Silesia. The Flemish in Belgium felt strong Flemish identity but not Belgian. The extreme nationalist Flemish insisted “that only ‘real’ Flemings can qualify as Flemish.” (Ceuppens and Foblets 2007). For them, “mastery of Dutch alone does not make you a Fleming.... Indeed, being brought up in a Flemish family alone does not suffice.....; it presupposes being taught ‘the art of being Flemish’” (Ceuppens and Foblets 2007) in order to produce self-conscious Flemings. Regional groups had a weak sense of wider national identity if any at all. The

weakest political identity for all groups was with the European Union, which was regarded as the most remote.

Community and citizenship

Strong identity with their local community was reflected in attitudes towards national citizenship. None of the groups had much time or interest in differences in legal citizenship. Only the Poles associated legal citizenship with feeling Polish. 'Legal citizenship' was simply that – a legal status which gave one certain rights. This was repeated again and again by different groups. Informants in all three regions made a very clear distinction between the 'good citizen' and the 'legal citizen'. Being a 'good' citizenship was important and that was about participating in the community and making a useful contribution. In Silesia, despite most of the participants being generally active themselves, it was acknowledged that a good citizen in some circumstances need not even be an active one. Personal circumstances were thought to sometimes preclude this but that didn't prevent such people from still being valuable members of the community. All were keen to act and be seen to act as good citizens. It was generally accepted that one does not have to be a 'legal citizen' in order to be a 'good citizen'.

Political Institutions: local, regional, national and European

As far as political institutions are concerned, local non-government organisations were more favourably regarded than local governments, with regional government less so than local government. The Flemish informants wanted far greater powers for regional government if not complete autonomy from the national state but were highly critical of the present regional government and its politicians. In Wales, with its newly established Welsh Assembly, the best that could be said for the Assembly was that regional government had some potential. In Silesia there were various calls for greater degrees of autonomy for the region, rather like those instituted recently in Wales. National government was generally regarded as remote and irrelevant. Trust in politicians and the political process was very low in all three regions. Where interest in national politics was expressed it related to specific issues which directly affected the group – things like employment and housing policy.

The EU was thought to be very remote. In 2007, Eurobarometer showed that 57% of people in the EU as a whole favoured EU membership, though this proportion varied greatly between countries, from 77% in the Netherlands to 30% in Austria with the UK at the lower end at 39% (Eurobarometer 2007). Low support for the EU in the UK is reflected in Wales where none of our identity groups expressed any interest in Europe or knew very much about European Union politics. The non-territorial ethnic group of Pakistanis were the best informed about the EU. Despite a general lack of awareness of European politics, membership of the European Union is however generally favoured by other groups. In Flanders, interest in the European Union was entirely pragmatic. Moroccans were particularly interested in the possibility of gaining recognition as a minority by the Union, since ethnic minorities are not constitutionally recognised within the Belgium state. Turks were also pragmatic. They were interested in the potential

membership of their family homeland - Turkey. The greatest interest in the EU was shown in Silesia in Poland, a new member of the EU. However, all groups in Silesia recognised that it was too soon for them to judge the full impact of membership yet.

Both in Silesia and in Belgium there was also an instrumental interest in the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' shown by regional groups. Silesians were keen on the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' which they saw as potentially highly beneficial to their own local region and its aspirations for greater autonomy. Indeed, Silesians were the only regional group in which Europe was rated slightly more interesting and relevant than their own national government. Some would rather identify with Silesia as a part of Europe than as a part of the Polish nation state. The Flemish, like the Silesians, were also supportive of the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions'. Flanders already has recognised legislative powers as a region within Europe and many would like full independence.

Elites and non-elites.

In Wales, both elites and non-elites confirmed that Welsh identity was an important part of life in Wales. This was true in everyday life but also at the level of politics and policy making. Although the Welsh language is spoken only by a minority of the population, it plays a key part in the definition of Welsh identity, as do symbols of Welshness like the flag. Both elites and non-elites had difficulty in giving a positive definition of Welsh identity, though among the 'core values' were "a strong sense of community and solidarity and a concern for the immediate family and neighbourhood" (Loughlin 2007). However, identity can also be defined negatively, which in Wales was mostly expressed in terms of opposition to England and Englishness.

The big difference between elites and non-elites was in their views on political institutions and processes. Non-elites were focused firmly on the very local. "For them, the political system, at whatever level, was very distant." (Loughlin 2007). Elite decision makers, on the other hand, were firmly involved in devolution and the movement of the nexus of power from the British parliament and administration to the Welsh Assembly. They were also very aware of the European dimension, from which Wales has economically benefited. Loughlin concludes that; "there is an important gap between these ordinary citizens and the political system and politicians in general." (Loughlin 2007).

Historically, Silesia has been a disputed territory. The present administrative and political regions in Poland do not entirely correspond to the 'ethnic' territories. After Solidarity won the elections in 1989, regional identity shifted from a social and cultural ideology to a political aspiration (Wodz, 2007). In the absence of a "spontaneous revival of regional culture" (Wodz, 2007) there was some inventing of traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) conducive to the political needs of aspiring political elites. This sought to differentiate between 'Silesians' and strangers – who were referred to as 'guests' - and emphasised particular regional borders and a history of heavy industrial production in order to differentiate it from and exclude neighbouring geographical areas. The end result

was a “highly positive image of ‘our folk’ ... representing them as reliable, working well, efficiently organised” (Wodz 2007).

Despite the strength of regional identity, the non-elites have not rallied to strongly support political institutions. Indeed, Silesian traditions seemed to act against political engagement. Wodz quotes a typical Silesian participant who exhorted the next generation as follows: “Children, do not join any political party.... because the main concern was to survive on this land and when the German came they would displace the Polish, and when the Polish came they would displace the German, and you should only be Silesians if you want to stay here” (Wodz 2007). Even some who were actively engaged in regional politics showed an aversion to the way in which political activity was conducted. “The majority Poles also were generally very much distrustful of politics and politicians as people who care for nothing but their own good, who are only interested in drawing some personal gain from their powerful position, and who stop thinking about the voters the day after the elections.” (Wodz 2007). Only among the German minority was “distrust towards politicians... much less outspoken.” (Wodz 2007). However, both the Silesians and the Poles felt that local government was most closely related to their interests and regional government next so. National government was remote and, to some extent, corrupt. The German minority felt that no political institution at any level served their particular interest, but like the Silesians, they did value non-governmental organisations. All Silesians and Germans claimed to be active in organisations either at local or regional level compared to only half of the Poles. However, at least half of the organisational involvement of all but the Poles was with organisations associated specifically with their ethnic groups and a strong motivation was cultural transmission.

Although Dutch is now the language of Flanders there are many differences between Flanders and the Netherlands, perhaps the strongest historically being religion. Whilst the Netherlands has historically been Protestant, Flanders, like the rest of Belgium, has been strongly Catholic. It has its own traditional symbols like an anthem and a flag, and a largely rural economy. The Dutch language is now an important component in the expression of Flemish identity, along with symbols like the flag, especially for extreme nationalists, although, the standardisation of Flemish dialects into standard Dutch is a relatively recent phenomenon. There are strong and widespread Flemish civic organisations but these are mostly associated with Christian- Democratic electors (Hooghe 2003) rather than Vlaams Belang (the extreme Flemish nationalist party). The latter has its own civic cultural and educational associations at both local and regional level. Vlaams Belang made its name in local politics with a strong anti-immigrant platform. Hence, social and cultural integration into Flanders society by ethnic minorities has created its own tension with local and regional politics.

The extreme nationalist Flemings are antipathetic to the Federal government because it is seen to be dominated by Francophones. But they also accuse regional and local politicians of either not taking Flemish identity seriously or of using it to their own advantage rather in the Flemish cause. Moroccans, as was shown above, identify with the Belgian state for convenience but not with its political class. They feel represented by neither federal nor Flemish politicians. “On the whole, participants felt best represented

politically by local government, although the presence of the extreme right made it “difficult to retain faith in the municipality” (Ceuppens and Foblets 2007). The Turks regarded the Belgium Federal government as dominated by the EU and were anxious that the EU might be responsible for eroding Turkish culture. Sub-Saharanans who were not born Belgium citizens were the most instrumentalist about citizenship. To them it was simply a short cut to obtaining certain rights. They also exhibit very low levels of trust in politics at all levels.

Moroccans were involved in their own civic associations aimed at overcoming discrimination. Turks similarly had their own civic associations, which were mostly cultural and leisure based. The same was true for Sub-Saharanans also. It was in these associations that they had the most faith. In second place, for all minority groups came local government. Overall, none of the participant groups in Flanders expressed much active engagement in politics at any level aside from their own group associations. Their actual political interest seems to have been determined by which level of government impacted most upon their lives. For ethnic minorities this was likely to be provincial integrationist policies. For the Flemish was it likely to be the very local level.

Summary and Conclusions

So to summarise, we can trace a similar pattern in all three of the regional case studies – most important to the non-elites is identification with the family, friends and the local community, then with the regions, and only after that with the nation state, and least of all with the European Union. Eurobarometer reports reflect similar findings as regards the E.U. In 1999, in the then European Union of 15 member states, only 38% of people thought there was a shared European identity, although 56% did feel attached to Europe. A mere 4% felt that they were solely ‘European’ although 48% identified with a combination of European identity and their own nationality. In the enlarged EU in 2005, defence and foreign policy were most commonly mentioned and favoured as roles for the EU although they are in reality minimal functions (Eurobarometer 2006(a)). This demonstrates a low level of knowledge. Another study in 2006 (Eurobarometer, 2006(b)) stressed peoples’ view of the protective character of the Union in maintaining peace, stability and security, and its capacity to be influential in world affairs, but were critical of the perceived gap between its principles and the reality of its practice. As far as the UK is concerned the recent Power Inquiry (2006) observed a wide scale involvement of people in community and charity work and in pressure groups, and concluded that the recent low turnout in formal democratic procedures like national elections was not due to apathy or lack of interest but to feelings that the processes of formal national democracy – political party dominance, lack of information about formal politics – led to a poor influence over the decision-taking process. Its recommendations included a shift of power from central to local government and an increasing involvement of the public in the decision making of all public bodies.

In each of the European states studied, the region has become an important political entity. Each region has been shown to have varied requirements and to contain a varied population. Simplistic solutions to issues of regional autonomy are therefore unlikely to

successfully accommodate them all. Some writers argue for flexibility and asymmetry in the arrangements. Wodz (2007, page 98) argues against a simple model of autonomy which is essentially 'top-down' and speaks of "varied geometric decentralisation" as the solution to regional administration. This is very like O'Neil's description of the UK's approach to devolution as "both asymmetrical and co-operative ... (with)... Scotland and Northern Ireland enjoying rather more self-government than Wales" (O'Neil 2004). Keating also argues that devolution in the United Kingdom "is more than mere decentralisation within a unitary state" (Keating 2004) though he points to strains endemic in asymmetry and believes that these strains may lead it "to acquire yet more formalised federal-type mechanisms" (Keating 2004) in order to balance the new devolved powers with the unreformed political and administrative centre.

Even so, these concerns are largely with the political balance between centre and periphery of the state. We are also concerned about the incorporation of non-territorial ethnicities into the policy making processes within the boundaries of the regional territorial communities. Their ethnic identities in relation to regional and national identities, their access to and engagement with local policy communities as well as their access to their rights are also key elements in achieving effective regionalisation of power. The move from 'government' to 'governance' may be one way of incorporating such groups into political decision making through consulting with 'ethnic' associations, at least for ethnic minority elites. However, the legitimacy of the policy making processes for both those of the regional culture and identity and those of other 'non-territorial ethnic groups' is likely to depend upon the political dimension. As Loughlin and Keating (1997) say: "regional government, where it exists, does matter and that mere governance will not always fulfil tasks of mobilization and collective action."

Belgium's rigid federalist structure was designed to reduce conflict between the various fractures within Belgium society, particularly that between the Flemish and Walloons, yet seems to satisfy neither the Flemish majority nor the ethnic minorities within Flanders. Indeed, the regionalisation of political decision-making increased the concerns of resident ethnic minorities, however well integrated into local society they were, as the strength of Flemish nationalism grew. Even those of our respondents who identify with the region and seek more local decision making are highly suspicious of politicians and the political process. Whatever the political institutional framework adopted in a region, it is clear that our respondents had little positive to say about the reality of the political process and the political elites who run it. Whilst devolution and the development of governance has brought political decision making closer to regional elites and potentially closer to certain non-elites it is clear that there remains a huge disjunction between non-elites and elites – a lack of trust both in the process and policies and in the institutions' capacity to deliver.

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