Scalar tensions in the governance of Waste: the resilience of state spatial Keynesianism

Simin Davoudi, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Simin.davoudi@ncl.ac.uk

Key words
Waste management, governance, regionalisation, state rescaling, spatial Keynesianism, RTABs

Abstract
Since the late 1990s, there has been a heightened academic and policy interest in the ‘region’ as a key site of economic, political and social activities. However, while the resurgence in English regionalisation is often explained as part of the wider process of state scalar strategy in response to global economic restructuring, less attention has been paid on the role of the region in rescaling of environmental governance, and in state strategy for addressing environmental problems such as waste management. By drawing on the evidence gathered for research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), this paper aims to advance the debate by examining the rescaling of environmental governance with particular emphasis on municipal waste planning in the UK. It is argued that such a focus adds a new dimension to current discussions on state spatiality. The central proposition is that, key elements of ‘spatial Keynesianism’ have been carried through, rather then being superseded in ‘the new metropolitan reform’. Following a brief summary of the municipal waste problem and the influence of the EU regulatory measures in changing waste policy discourses and practices in the UK, the paper situates the regional institution building for waste planning in its historical context and outlines the broader debate about state rescaling strategies. The paper will then discuss the key rationales for regionalisation of waste to substantiate the central argument of this paper; i.e. the resilience of some of the key features of spatial Keynesianism in the new wave of metropolitan reforms. The final part of the paper unpicks the inherent tensions in state rescaling strategy as manifested in the newly established regional institutions in England. It outlines the key factors which have undermined the capacity of the state’s reconfigured regional institutions to achieve their prescribed goals.
1. Introduction: the ascendance of the region

Since the late 1990s, there has been a heightened academic and policy interest in the ‘region’ as a key site of economic, political and social activities. The upsurge is reflected in the growing literature on what Lovering (1999) calls ‘new regionalism’ (see for example Regional Studies Special Issue, 2002 and 2007). While the November 2004 ‘No’ vote in the referendum on regional government in the North East of England closed down the prospect of establishing elected regional bodies for eight English regions (Pearce, 2005), it did, at the same time, re-open the debate on the role of existing regional institutions in the multi-level governance arrangement in the UK (Robinson, 2004). Indeed, in some areas new legislation and national policy have strengthened the role of regional institutions in decision making. A notable example is municipal waste planning. Here, publication of a national Planning Policy Statement (ODPM, 2005) elevated the role of the regions in strategic planning for waste. It also re-asserted the position of the regional waste groups which were first established in 1999 (DETR, 1999). Furthermore, regional spatial strategies, which include regional waste policies, have been given statutory weight as a result of a legislative change in the UK planning system in 2004. Hence, the process of English regionalisation is still ongoing and, in the areas such as municipal waste planning is gathering pace. As with the sustainable development agenda in general (CPRE, 1998; Tomaney and Ward 2000), it appears that the politics of sustainable waste management has promoted regional consciousness. However, while regionalisation is often explained as part of the wider process of state scalar strategy in response to
global economic restructuring (see for example Martin and Sunley, 1997), less
attention has been paid on the role of the region in rescaling of environmental
governance, and in state strategy for addressing environmental problems such as
waste management. As Boyle (2002: 172) argues, ‘while social contests over the
scaling of governance have tended thus far to focus upon the dialectical relations
between scale and political economy, … ecological projects too are fundamentally
produced by and implicated in the structuration of scale’.

By drawing on the evidence gathered for an ESRC-funded research, this paper
aims to advance the debate by examining the re-scaling of environmental governance
with particular emphasis on municipal waste planning in the UK. It is argued that
such a focus adds a new dimension to current discussions on state spatiality. The
central proposition is that, key elements of ‘spatial Keynesianism’ have been carried
through, rather then being superseded, in what Brenner (2003) calls ‘the new
metropolitan reform’. The research project, which was undertaken between December
2001 and October 2004 and partly updated in 2007/08, focused on ‘regionalisation
and the new politics of waste’. Particular emphasis was put on the formation and role
of the Regional Technical Advisory Bodies (RTABs) which were established in all
nine English regions (including London) during the late 1990s and early 2000s. In
addition to extensive documentary analyses (including the review of local plans in
three case study areas) and non-participant observations, 62 face-to-face, semi-
structured interviews were conducted with key actors from different sectors and at
different spatial scales (see Davoudi, et al, 2005). RTABs are one of the latest
additions to the complex institutional landscape of waste which has been constantly
unsettled by the reconfigurations of its policy networks. They are multi-stakeholder
and voluntary regional groups who work alongside the Regional Assemblies (which
are indirectly elected spatial planning bodies) to produce coordinated regional waste strategies.

The paper consists of six main sections. The next section provides a summary of the municipal waste problem and the influence of the EU regulatory measures in changing waste policy discourses and practices in the UK. Section three situates the regional institution building for waste planning in its historical context and outlines the wider debate about state rescaling strategies. Section four discusses the key rationales for regionalisation of waste to substantiate the central argument of this paper; i.e. the resilience of some of the key features of spatial Keynesianism in what is known as the new wave of metropolitan reforms (Brenner, 2003). Section five unpicks the inherent tensions in state rescaling strategy as manifested in the newly established regional institutions such as the RTABs and the Regional Assemblies. It outlines the key factors which have undermined the capacity of the state’s reconfigured regional institutions to achieve their prescribed goals.

2. Municipal waste problem in England and the EU regulatory powers

Although municipal waste represents only a small fraction (about 10.7% in 2006/07) of total waste produced (DEFRA, 2007a), its collection and disposal have often been more challenging than, for example, industrial and commercial waste. This is because it is heterogeneous and difficult to sort. It also involves local electorates and is, hence, a politically sensitive area of public policy. The combination of these factors makes the efficient and sustainable management of municipal waste a challenging activity both environmentally and politically. This, to some extent, is due to decades of policy neglect during which municipal waste, as other waste streams, was not seen as a problem; neither was it considered as something that had to be managed rather than
merely disposed of in voids created by minerals extraction (Davoudi, 2006). As a result, landfill remained (and still is) the main disposal option because it was considered cheap, convenient and even beneficial for ‘filling the holes in the ground’. Little attempts were made to introduce more sustainable waste management practices. It was this political apathy and the over-reliance on landfill which, in the 1990s led to Britain being labelled as the ‘dirty man of Europe’.

What led to a subsequent crisis, however, was not just the concern with Britain’s image in Europe, but also the struggle to catch up with the emerging EU waste regulatory policies. Through its legislative powers, the EU has been able to exert strong environmental control since the late 1980s. Indeed, the majority of environmental regulatory measures which have been introduced in Britain in the last two decades have originated in Europe. The EU Directives which are binding on the member states have been particularly influential in shaping environmental policies at the national levels. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the waste management area. The main tenets of the EU policy on waste go back to 1989 when the Community Strategy for Waste Management (CEC, 1989) was adopted. While this was later reviewed in 1996, it led to significant pieces of legislation which together provided the foundation for the EU policy on waste. This general legal framework was supplemented by several other directives dealing with specific waste streams and setting technical standards for waste treatment and disposal facilities, notably for energy from waste (EfW) incineration and landfill. As will be discussed later, landfill became the subject of another influential EU Directive with far reaching consequences for the UK waste policy. It was against this backdrop that the UK waste strategy: Making Waste Work (DoE, 1995) was published in 1995. This was the
government’s first major policy document since the publication of the 1974 Green Paper: *the War on Waste* (DoE and DoI, 1974).

The central plank of the strategy, reproduced from the EU *Waste Framework Directive*, was the concept of the waste hierarchy (Figure 1a); an influential and enduring concept in terms of its impact on the emerging waste policies and discourses in the UK (Davoudi, 2000). The waste hierarchy put the prevention, reduction and reuse of waste at the top of management priorities, followed by recovery of material and energy, with landfill being considered as the least environmentally favourable option. While the hierarchy marked a clear shift of policy in the UK, away from ‘filling the holes in the ground’ to more sustainable waste management practices, its grounding into regional and local policies remained a source of controversy. This was particularly because of the ranking of material recovery (i.e. recycling and composting) on par with energy recovery (notably EfW incineration) on the waste hierarchy, as shown in Figure 1a.

Figure 1a: The waste hierarchy as of 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waste reduction</th>
<th>Waste prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-use</td>
<td>Re-use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery:</td>
<td>Recycle/Compost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycle/Compost</td>
<td>Energy recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy recovery</td>
<td>Disposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from DoE, 1995: 5, figure 1.3

Figure 1b: The waste hierarchy as of 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waste reduction</th>
<th>Waste prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-use</td>
<td>Re-use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery:</td>
<td>Recycle/Compost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycle/Compost</td>
<td>Energy recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy recovery</td>
<td>Disposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from DEFRA, 2007b: 28, figure 1.3

Positioning EfW incineration at the same level as recycling turned what was seen as a technically attractive waste management option into what could also be considered as
an environmentally favourable one in policy terms. This became increasingly the case after the introduction of a series of stringent targets for the reduction in landfilling of biodegradable waste by the EU Landfill Directive in 1999 (see Box 1). Non-compliance with these targets would lead to EU fines in the order of several million pounds. This plus the rising cost of landfill and the shortage of sites made EfW incineration a viable option for shifting a large amount of biodegradable waste away from landfill sites. However, the actual and perceived health and pollution risks from incinerators made them unpalatable to: environmental groups, local electorates, and politicians who in various alliances were able to overhaul their development. Hence, at the time this research was conducted, ‘to have’ or ‘not to have’ EfW incinerators had become a contested policy debate and a source of scalar tension in the process of regional waste strategy making. The extent of controversy was clearly reflected in the reactions to the government’s 1999 draft waste strategy. The strategy stated that in order to meet the EU-driven targets, a dramatic growth in new facilities, including 130 new incinerators (DETR, 1999:25) was required. The publication of these figures led to unprecedented coverage in national newspapers (for example The Guardian 2000). These pressures forced the government to move references to the required incinerators in the final version of the strategy from the main text to the very back of the document (DETR, 2000).

By the late 1990s, therefore, the overall picture was that of a crisis in planning for sustainable waste management with the level of recycling and composting remaining at seven percent and landfill at 84% in 1996/97 (DEFRA, 2004). Within this context, formation of the RTABs as part of a wider regional governance arrangement for waste planning was, to a large extent, the state’s response to this crisis. An important remit of the RTABs was to help municipalities meet the EU and
government targets by coordinating their policies, resolving inter-municipal conflicts and establishing the need for and the location of major waste management facilities, such as EfW incinerators. The assumption was that by creating a ‘technical’ body at the upper, regional, level such inherently political issues would be depoliticised and the delivery of required infrastructure would be speeded up. In other words, formation of regional waste groups reflected the ‘ongoing crisis-induced transformations of state spatiality’ (Brenner 2003: 297) and its struggle to manage and redistribute the environmental footprints of economic growth and particularly its mounting waste generation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Targets to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Banning co-disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous waste, and a requirement for separate landfills for hazardous, non-hazardous and inert wastes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Banning landfill of tyres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Banning landfill of liquid wastes, infectious clinical wastes and certain types of hazardous waste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provisions on the control, monitoring, reporting and closure of sites.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most significant of these is the first. Taking account of a four-year derogation offered to those countries heavily reliant on landfill, the targets for the UK are to reduce biodegradable municipal waste landfilled to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 75% of that produced in 1995, by 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 50% of that produced in 1995, by 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 35% of that produced in 1995, by 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU member states had until 16 July 2001 to transpose the Directive into national law. The UK government started this process with the publication of a consultation paper, Limiting Landfill, in October 1999. However, the transposition deadline was missed and a second, delayed, consultation was issued by DEFRA in August 2001. This paper included draft regulations for the first time. Legislation to transpose the technical provisions of the landfill Directive into law was finally laid before Parliament in May 2002, and took effect in England and Wales on 15 June, only one month before implementation of the Directive commenced on 16 July 2002. In 2007, the UK government set new, higher recycling / composting and recovery targets (40% and 53% by 2010 respectively) for municipal waste in order to meet one of its key objectives, which is: ‘to meet and exceed the Landfill Directive diversion targets for biodegradable municipal waste in 2010 … (DEFRA, 2007b: 11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 1: EU Landfill Directive and its transposition into the UK statute

Source: adapted from Davoudi and Evans (2004: 102, Appendix 1)

3. Regional institution building and state rescaling strategy
As Wannop (1995:10) observes, the building of regional structures in the UK began after the election of the Labour Government in 1964, which ‘brought planning back to the heart of economic and regional policy’. This was marked by the creation of Economic Planning Councils and Boards (which were composed of senior civil servants). Over the following thirty years, these institutions evolved into various forms of Regional Planning Conferences and Regional Associations in all English regions. The introduction of these regional (and metropolitan) arrangements in the UK, and elsewhere in North America and western Europe, is seen as an institutional component of the Fordist-Keynesian social project (Keating, 1998) which aimed at providing ‘administrative efficiency, local service provisions, regional planning and spatial redistribution within the nationally organized macroeconomic policy frameworks of the Keynesian welfare national state’ (Brenner, 2003: 300). It is argued that these regional institutions were the ‘spatial fixes’ which underpinned the post-war mode of state intervention in economic regulation. Within this ‘spatial Keynesianism’ (Martin 1993) ‘the regions were subordinated to the macro-economic and macro-distributive imperatives of the centre’ (Martin and Sunley, 1997:280). The nation state was the key site for promoting economic growth and redistributing it evenly through the national territory, with local and regional scales serving ‘primarily as transmission belts for national economic and social politics’ (Jessop, 2002:71).

By the 1970s, however, a number of external and internal factors triggered the decline of Fordist-Keynesianism and its ‘scalar scaffolding’ (Brenner, 1998), which in England became epitomised by the abolition of the large scale, technocratic, and bureaucratised metropolitan county councils in 1986. In its place, a new wave of regional cooperation emerged in response to a number of factors such as: globalisation forces, escalating influence of European regional policy and the prospect
of a new Labour government with a relatively strong regional agenda. Hence, moves towards regional institution building (such as Regional Chambers and Assemblies) began to gather pace in the mid-1990s with the first Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) Notes being issued across English regions. It is argued that this second wave of metropolitan reforms is qualitatively different from the first one in the sense that the focus of the new regionalisation is on entrepreneurship, economic competitiveness and promotion of endogenous regional growth (Jonas and Ward, 2002). Hence, Brenner (2003:302) suggests that, ‘the managerial forms of metropolitan political organization that predominated during the era of high Fordism have been superseded by entrepreneurial, competitiveness-oriented approaches to metropolitan governance’. However, as is discussed below, the insight from a focus on environmental governance, with an emphasis on governance of waste, shows that the new regionalisation, as part of the wider process of state spatial restructuring, has maintained, rather than abandoned, some of the key rationales which underpinned the earlier wave of metropolitan reforms.

4. Regionalisation of waste governance: a new spatial Keynesianism

Following Brenner (2003:315), the emergence of a regional level of governance for waste during the 1990s can be conceptualized as ‘a constellation of political responses to the policy failures, coordination problems, institutional dislocation and crisis-tendencies … that prevailed during the previous decades’. However, evidence from the changing governance of waste planning shows that this emerging form of regionalisation has carried through, rather than superseded, key features of Fordist-Keynesianism. In fact, the three familiar Keynesian goals of: policy coordination and administrative efficiency; regional strategic planning; and, spatial redistribution,
which were the focus of the first wave of metropolitan reforms, have continued to provide key rationales for state rescaling of environmental governance in the second wave of metropolitan reforms. The following account, structured under the abovementioned three Keynesian goals, will substantiate this argument by drawing on the evidence from the research on regionalisation of waste.

4.1 Policy coordination and administrative efficiency

The 1990s’ renaissance of regionalisation has been place-specific and diverse, varying not only between (Herrschel and Newman, 2000; Salet et al, 2003), but also within the western European countries. In the UK, such diversity has been reflected in the multiple development paths taken by regional planning bodies (Regional Assemblies) as well as in the contents of the regional planning guidance notes which they produced (Davoudi et al, 2005). However, as regards the latter, one thing they all shared was the limited attention given to waste policies. As mentioned above, historically waste had not been considered as a planning or policy controversy, particularly not at the regional level. It was not until the late 1990s when the debate about waste pushed its way into the regional planning arenas. Even then, waste policies were largely the reiteration of national guidance and general statements about waste management practices. Coupled with this policy vacuum has been the fragmentation of institutional architecture for waste and the multiplicity of actors and agencies involved. This has often led to confusion over ‘who does what’ and the overlap of roles and responsibilities particularly between waste pollution control and land use regulation (Davoudi, 2000; Bulkely et al, 2005). The former is the responsibility of the centrally-appointed Environment Agency and the latter is within the remit of the locally-elected municipalities. The municipalities are also responsible
for collection and disposal of municipal waste. The two functions are further split between the two tiers of those municipalities that are not operating as a unitary system.

The regionalisation of waste, manifested in formation of the RTABs in the late 1990s, was, therefore, part of a state strategy to inject a degree of regulatory and policy coordination into these fragmented and disparate institutional relationships; a move which was promoted under the New Labour’s banners of joined-up thinking, stakeholder engagement and regional devolution. As Brenner (2003:298) puts it, ‘in many instances, the defeat of more comprehensive metropolitan reform initiatives (has) generated a new momentum for compromise solutions that address regional governance problems through informal partnerships’. Hence, a key remit of the RTABs was to bring together different stakeholders from across the public, private and voluntary sector and coordinate their waste-related policies and activities. To this end, the RTABs were to provide, for example, the much-needed evidence-base in the form of quantitative data on the amount of waste produced and the methods by which it was managed in each municipality and across the region as a whole. Given the complexity of waste flows and management practices, such a task was seen as being beyond the capacity of a single municipality. Hence, a key focus of the project of institutional up-scaling was administrative efficiency and policy coordination.

Related to this objective was the need to align the boundaries of the political / administrative units with the functional areas; another familiar Keynesian rationality which underpinned the first wave of metropolitan reforms. As Harvey (1989:153) suggests: ‘local jurisdictions frequently divide rather than unify the urban regions, thus emphasizing the segmentations (…) rather than the tendency towards structured coherence…’. In the case of waste, the transfer of waste from places where it is
produced to places where it is treated or disposed of often cut across the jurisdictional boundaries. However, while ‘the mismatch between local administrative units and the functional-economic territory of metropolitan regions has been analysed from a range of methodological perspectives’, (Brenner, 2003:299), less attention has been paid to the mismatch between the local administrative (and planning) units and the functional-environmental territory (see Davoudi, 2008, for a critique of the city-region concept). Yet, such a mismatch can be as problematic for environmental planning as it is for economic development initiatives. Hence, as with the 1960s’ metropolitan reforms which aimed at aligning the administrative boundaries to the functional areas, the up-scaling of waste governance to the regional level was seen as providing better policy coordination as well as efficiency in the delivery of waste infrastructure.

There were other influential factors, too, for the region to become the preferred ‘scalar fix’. One important factor was the EU regulatory requirements - introduced by the EU Waste Framework Directive- which obligated the member states to take into account two interrelated principles of regional self-sufficiency and proximity principle. These refer to the need for managing waste near the areas where it is produced by minimising the health and pollution risks associated with the transfer of waste. The discourse of regional self-sufficiency, therefore, added a functional rationale to the efficiency rationale for establishing a regional level of coordination in the form of the RTABs. Another significant factor which justified the regionalisation of waste was the restructuring of the waste management industry and its transformation from predominantly small scale local operators to large scale multinational corporations. This was a move driven by the escalating costs of the EU-induced stricter environmental standards and the inability of small companies to remain viable. The restructuring of the waste industry was coupled with a shift
towards fewer but larger regional waste facilities capable of serving more than one municipality. This created an additional rationale for institutional up-scaling. It was considered that regional bodies, particularly those with a technical label, could transcend local parochial approaches to decision making about the need for and the location of these larger and specialised, yet highly contested, waste plants such as EfW incinerators.

Together: the consolidation of the waste industry into larger, multinational corporations, the policy direction towards regional self-sufficiency, and the emergence of larger waste facilities intensified problems of the mismatch between the administrative units and the catchment area for the ‘waste management market’. They, thus, further justified the creation of a regionally configured state regulatory control and policy coordination in the form of RTABs.

4.2 Regional strategic planning

As mentioned earlier, for over two decades since the 1970s’ economic downturn the management of waste in the UK was taking place within a policy vacuum and with little regard to environmental costs of landfill as the dominant practice. This policy neglect was even more prominent within the planning system. Until 1994, when the first national Planning Policy Guidance Note was issued (DoE, 1994), government legislation and guidelines had concentrated solely on waste licensing and pollution regulation rather than spatial planning dimensions. Yet, at the local level this lack of national planning policy was not considered problematic because of the ample supply of quarries which provided convenient tipping sites. Little attempts were made by local planners to identify alternative sites, justify their spatial distribution, or develop
more sustainable waste policies and practices. This is clearly reflected in the following statement from a district planner:

At the time, landfill seemed quite an attractive way of getting these holes in the ground dealt with. Fill them up, put grass and trees on the top and hey presto! But then you have tricky things like landfill gas to deal with… (interview, 1996).

Hence, for a long time the role of the planning system was reduced to that of reiterating a series of standard site-specific regulatory criteria. Planning policies for waste, often only a few policies tacked on at the back of development plans, were devoid of a long term strategic approach to waste. This, however, changed in 1991 when local planning authorities were charged with the preparation of a complete waste local plan for their entire jurisdiction. Furthermore, these plans were given a higher status in the development control decisions. These twin processes meant that planning arenas became the sites of struggle over the future location of waste management facilities, leading to long-winded public inquiries across the country (Waste Planning, 1993). In cases where public reaction to a proposed location were anticipated to be particularly vociferous, some local authorities abandoned site identification in the plans altogether. The resultant inconsistencies and uncertainties throughout the country mobilised the waste industry to lobby the government for a change in what they called the ‘planning gridlock’ (Adams, 1996:3).

A key governmental response to this crisis was to re-introduce regional strategic planning in order to coordinate local planning policies at the upper scale. This was to be done through the processes of regional waste strategy making, in which the RTABs were to play a significant part. Hence, as with the first wave of metropolitan reforms, the resurgence of regional institutions in the 1990s was also underpinned by a perceived need for regional planning. Preparation of regional waste strategies by a technical body (i.e. the RTABs) was seen as a way of addressing the controversies
arising from the location of major regional facilities and from the cross-border movement of waste, as will be discussed later. The new ‘scalar scaffolding’, coupled with the emphasis on the RTABs’ technical remit, were seen as providing a neutral space in which ‘expert’ officers, sheltered from highly vocal localities, could come up with a technically-sound solution to the problem of waste management in the region. Within such an arena, it was hoped that: the debate on planning for waste management would be technicised and depoliticised, a rational decision would be taken and the delivery of the much needed waste infrastructure, including incinerators, would be speeded up.

4.3 Spatial redistribution

It is argued that a key focus of the 1960s’ metropolitan reforms was on spatial redistribution of economic activities within a Keynesian welfare national state (Keating, 1997). For several decades, such a focus underpinned the traditional regional policies in which the nation state was the key site for promoting economic growth and for redistributing it across the national territory. These policies were often implemented by providing infrastructure and financial incentives to attract the footloose capital to disadvantaged regions. However, following the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian development model in the 1970s and the rise of a new mosaic of uneven spatial development, it is argued that such ‘spatial Keynesianism’ faded away (Dunford and Kafkalas, 1992; Swyngedouw, 1992; Brenner, 2003). Hence, the focus of the second wave of metropolitan reforms in the 1990s shifted from spatial redistribution to the strengthening of locally-specific, endogenous growth opportunities. Socio-spatial redistribution was replaced by economic competitiveness as the focus of the new metropolitan / regional restructuring.
However, as is shown below, analyses of environmental governance provide an alternative perspective on the dynamics of state spatiality; suggesting that the state’s strategy for spatial redistribution still plays a major part in its scalar selectivity. They suggest that the resurgence of the regions in the 1990s has maintained, rather than abandoned, the underlying spatial redistribution rationale. However, despite such continuity, there remain two key differences. Firstly, the redistributive aspect of rescaling is related to, what Ulrick Beck (1992) calls, environmental ‘bads’ rather than economic ‘goods’. Secondly, instead of redistribution taking place in the context of nationally-initiated policy framework, as was the case in the 1960s, it is being necessitated under the regulatory pressures from the supra-national bodies such as the EU. Following a brief outline of Beck’s notion of ‘bads’, these will be elaborated by drawing on the evidence from waste planning.

Beck (1992) argues that, the present ecological crisis, along with other social transformations, signifies the emergence of a new form of societal arrangement which he describes as ‘risk society’. Risk society represents a new phase in the process of modernisation in which the ‘production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks’ (Beck, 1992:19 original emphasis). Beck argues that, ‘the more modern a society becomes, the more unintended consequences it produces, and as these become known and acknowledged, they call the foundations of industrial modernisation into question’ (Beck, 1998:91). He describes this contemporary social experience as ‘reflexive modernisation’ with society having to respond continuously to unanticipated risks through periodic institutional changes. Coupled with this fundamental change in society is a shift in the role of politics. He suggests that the emphasis of the politics has been forced to shift from conflict over distribution of welfare to conflicts over social and environmental risks which are the unwanted
consequences of industrial society itself. Hence, while in the early modernity, politics was primarily concerned with the social and spatial distribution of ‘goods’, in the reflexive modernity of risk society it has been concerned with the distribution of ‘bads’ such as environmental degradation and waste generation. The need to deal with such environmental ‘bads’ has led to a crisis in state regulatory institutions that are responsible for managing them. Hence, while Beck’s risk society theory confirms that the current metropolitan reforms and the new regionalisation reflect and express the on-going crisis-induced transformation of state spatiality (Brenner, 2003), it challenges the idea that current restructuring has left behind the redistributive rationale which underpinned the first wave of metropolitan reforms. Indeed, as the insight from our research on regionalisation of waste has shown, such a rationale has continued to play a major part in the 1990s’ state rescaling. The key difference is that the political struggle over ‘who gets what’ has been extended from economic goods to environmental bads, among which the pollution risks associated with the management of waste are increasingly paramount. Such struggles are not only played out over the location of waste facilities and at the level of individual sites. They are also enacted over the transfer of waste and at the level of municipalities. Here, the controversies are particularly acute when one municipality has to deal with the waste produced in another, leading to deep-seated social and environmental conflicts. It was the need to resolve these inter-municipal redistributive conflicts which underpinned, and rationalised, the project of institutional up-scaling for the management of waste in the 1990s, as elaborated below.

Within the English regions, the waste flows are typically from metropolitan counties (with large urban areas) to the surrounding shire (and often rural) districts. Hence, the environmental and political tensions arising from these flows are
particularly high between waste-exporting metropolitan areas and waste-importing
shire in regions such as: the North West, the West Midlands and the South East
(Davoudi et al, 2005). In the late 1990s, in the North West Region, for example, over
half of Greater Manchester’s landfilled municipal waste and about 40 percent of
Merseyside’s were managed in the Mid-Mersey area (NWRTAB, 2004), turning
places such as Warrington into what is often expressed locally as the ‘dustbin of the
North West’. In terms of inter-regional waste movement, the main flows are from
London to the East of England and the South East Region. London sent about 70
percent of its municipal waste to landfill sites elsewhere, particularly in Essex and
Bedfordshire (EA, 2000). By the late 1990s, the declining landfill sites and stricter
regulatory standards had intensified the inter-municipal and inter-regional conflicts.
And, as the pressure from the EU regulatory muscles began to increase, so did the
strategies of resistance by waste-importing municipalities.

The project of institutional up-scaling which led to formation of the RTABs
was a way of managing the spatial redistribution of environmental bads; i.e. the risks
associated with the management of municipal waste. Using the process of regional
waste strategy, the RTABs were to apportion the total amount of waste produced in
the region to their constituent municipalities for treatment and disposal. The
discourse through which such a policy was to be mobilised was the EU-driven
principle of regional self-sufficiency. The region was seen as creating a neutral scale
for the redistribution of risks attached to waste management in a climate free from
perceived local, parochial conflicts. RTABs’ members saw the regional arenas as sites
which: ‘allow people to be a little bit removed from the rough and tumble of local
politics, to sit back and take a larger perspective….’ (interview, 2004).
To sum up, rescaling of environmental governance and in particular the project of institutional up-scaling for the management of waste was largely underpinned by the same Keynesian rationales which shaped the earlier wave of regionalisation; i.e. policy coordination and administrative efficiency; regional strategic planning; and, spatial redistribution.

5. The continuing crisis tendencies in state scalar architecture

The remaining parts of this paper will draw on the findings from the research to demonstrate: firstly, how this crisis-induced re-scaling of environmental governance has itself been riddled with tensions; and secondly, how these tensions have undermined the capacity of the new regional institutions to achieve their prescribed goals of policy coordination, conflict resolution and spatial redistribution of risks. Our findings confirm Brenner’s argument that, the newly established regulatory frameworks ‘generally internalize rather than resolve the crisis-tendencies associated with earlier forms of …. governance’ (Brenner 2003:316). In the case of regionalisation of waste, state rescaling led to reconfiguration of power geometries and intense struggles between political coalitions and territorial alliances over the terms of engagement, jurisdictional boundaries, redistribution strategies for environmental bads, and democratic accountability. These are elaborated below.

5.1 The new power geometries and the struggle over the terms of engagement

As Boyle (2002) argues, scale itself becomes a site of struggle with actors developing various strategies of inclusion and exclusions in the new scalar fixes. Rescaling also provokes various strategies of resistance to a particular scale. The regionalisation of waste in the late 1990s radically reconfigured institutional relationships and power
geometries. It not only added a new layer to the splintered regulatory geography, but also privileged certain interests and marginalised others in the power relations. A process described by Smith (1993) as ‘jumping of scale’ in which some interests and voices came to the foreground while others were pushed to the background. This is reflected for example in the size and composition of the RTABs. While these were varied across the English regions (due to a lack of prescription by central government), a broad pattern of engagement emerged manifesting the shifting power geometry. Among the actors whose position was elevated in the new regional arenas were the representatives from the waste management industry and the planning officers from the municipalities. The former were represented in all RTABs due to their critical role in the provision of waste infrastructure in the increasingly privatised sector. The latter were propelled from a previously marginal position to a prominent one due to their role in regional waste strategy making and the increasing significance of site allocation for waste facilities (Davoudi, 1999). On the other hand, those who moved to a background position were the community and environmental groups. The latter in particular had surprisingly limited success in securing a seat at the RTABs’ table. This is surprising because large and well-organised environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth (FoE), are often quite effective in lobbying at the upper scales of governance and in influencing national policy. Yet, at the regional level they failed to have a strong presence. Initially, out of nine RTABs, only one (in the Yorkshire and Humber Region) invited them to their meetings. Environmental groups’ struggle over representation in the newly configured regional arenas for waste was played out most explicitly in the North West (NW) Region. Here, despite multiple requests by the FoE to participate in the meetings, the NWRTAB resisted their inclusion - mainly on the ground of the perceived FoE’s anti-incineration and zero-waste views; thinking
that, ‘(they) … may not have been able to maintain a consensus, and (they) may have always had a minority report coming out’ (Interview, 2002). This approach raised doubts about the RTABs’ claim to neutrality and objectivity, leading to a suggestion by a member of the FoE that, ‘there was some sort of alliances between industry and …the policy makers about what was going to happen…But we could not put our fingers on it’ (interview, 2004).

Rescaling shifted the balance of power relations among the policy makers too, switching the position of power away from the metropolitan counties (conurbations) towards the shire districts, particularly in places such as the North West Region that had a long and contested history of cross-border flows of waste. Traditionally, the former has played a dominant role in the regional arenas such as the Assembly, as reflected in the following statement by a shire district officer:

The political power within the Assembly is with the conurbation authorities. The district shires would see themselves as incredibly distant…. and therefore not bothering … (interview, 2004).

However, in contrast to their dominant weight in the Assembly, conurbations’ position on the NWRTAB became rather marginal. Here, the shires, particularly those at the receiving end of the waste flows, were setting the agendas, leading the collection and interpretation of data, advancing the preparation of technical report and providing the key inputs into the regional waste strategy. Their motivation was largely based on their long term policy aspiration to stop or radically reduce the movement of waste into their area, as reflected below.

Warrington is stuck between Greater Manchester and Merseyside, there are two large landfill sites both of which take a significant amount of waste from (them) and these are seen as very emotional developments within the borough. One of the main drivers has been to try and cut back on the importation of waste (interview, 2004).
To do so, the shire districts challenged the EU-driven discourse of regional self-sufficiency - which tended to normalise the uneven effect of the waste management activities on specific localities - by re-interpreting it at the *sub-regional* rather than regional level. The main thrust of their argument was that each sub-region, notably metropolitan areas, should become self-sufficient in terms of managing and disposing of their own waste. This was to put an end to decades of what was considered by the shires as a major injustice in the redistribution of environmental bads. An injustice that had been legitimised by the lack of landfill sites in urban areas. In the face of the apparent solution offered by the EfW incineration, which could be located in the metropolitan industrial areas, such legitimization was no longer seen as credible. On the other side of this new politics of waste were the metropolitan counties whose aim was to contest the sub-regional self-sufficiency agenda and retain the existing power relations in the regional arenas. Hence, they were developing their own strategy of resistance to rescaling; arguing that, ‘the big issue is sub-regional self-sufficiency arguments; people don’t want the Assembly to foist facilities on them’ (interview, 2002). An indication of such resistance was their attempt to undermine the credibility and authority of the RTAB by not taking part in their meetings. Indeed, ‘the conurbation authorities were often noticeable by their absence… They were not bothering because the power was elsewhere’ (Collins, 1998:151).

It is therefore evident that despite the intents behind the project of institutional up-scaling, regionalisation did not provide a neutral space for conflict resolution. In fact, as in other areas of public policy (see Deas and Ward, 2000) regional mechanisms were exacerbating long-standing intra-regional tensions. This is certainly the case as regards regionalisation of waste which served to re-scale rather than re-solve the existing and emerging tensions; partly because, waste was seen as ‘a bloody difficult
area to deal with, and so those decisions are very hard for politicians to make, wherever they’re made’ (interview, 2002). Furthermore, the scale itself became the site of political contestation where actors became engaged ‘in a discursive strategy to make their scalar political project seem as natural, normal and legitimate as possible’ (Gonzalez, 2006:838). This is clearly reflected in the following statement by a metropolitan county planning officer.

If you’re securing contracts for volumes like we’re talking about …. then you do need to have a look on a regional basis, … Not say the regional strategy is based upon every sub-region sorting its own problem out, … If you’re going to be regional, you need to be regional, and not just dump the problem back at source. … I do not believe, just because waste is being created within urban regions, therefore you’ve got to build all these facilities in an urban region (interview 2004, original emphasis)

These new politics of waste were played out not only at the regional scale, between the municipalities, but also at the national scale, between the regions. Indeed, the strengthening of the regional institutions increased the resistance to the inter-regional flows of waste. For some regional actors (such as those in the East of England), the regional scale was seen as a way of providing a united front on waste issues; giving local authorities ‘a new level of bargaining counter with particularly London to start trying to lobby over the waste stream’ (interview, 2004). These findings confirm the view expressed by several commentators who have highlighted a range of difficulties in making the new regional arrangements work (Shutt, 2000) and have questioned the potential for regionalisation to deliver coordination in areas such as planning for housing and minerals (Cowell and Murdoch, 1999), not least because of existing hierarchical arrangements and path-dependencies which have proved difficult to dislodge (Davoudi and Evans, 2005). The RTABs were created as
privileged and neutral arenas in which new forms of sustainable waste management policy could be mobilised. However, the existing and emerging tensions from the ‘politics of scales’ (Swyngedouw, 2000; Gonzalez, 2006) as well as a number of other factors fundamentally undermined their capacity to deliver. Critical among such factors were: the lack of legitimacy, accountability and political clout; limited resources and ambivalent mandate; and, the existence of institutional fragmentation at the national level. These are elaborated below, in turn.

5.2 Legitimacy, accountability and political clout

In the absence of an elected tier of regional government, regional arrangements have long attracted concerns about power, control and accountability to the population they serve (Saunders, 1985). The regional scale is seen as having little political clout among local politicians, as shown in the following statement, ‘if you talk to the politicians… they dismiss the regional assembly as a toothless tiger’ (interview, 2002, original emphasis). As Brenner (2003) argues, the metropolitan (or regional) institutions cannot, in themselves resolve the pervasive governance failures, regulatory deficits and legitimization problems, despite their explicit attention to problems of inter-scalar coordination. In the case of the RTABs, while the various abovementioned rationales were creating a hegemonic narrative in favour of the regionalisation of waste, issues around power, membership and accountability were overshadowing the RTABs’ ability to fulfil their prescribed goals, as reflected below:

There is a concern with regard to the sub-regional acceptance of a body which is not an elected body….and therefore anything that it is empowered to do is felt to be undemocratic (interview, 2004)
In the struggle over scale, regional institutions’ remoteness from the local electorates were often drawn upon to promote the advantages of local over the regional scale as the appropriate site for decision making. RTABs’ lack of legitimacy was exacerbated with the low profile of waste on the political agenda. At the regional level debate about waste were being crowded out by housing and transport issues. At the local level there was a perception that, ‘for many local authority members... there’s no good news in waste; … and waste is not a vote winner’ (interview, 2002). Hence, the combined effect of the lack of legitimacy and political clout substantially reduced the RTABs’ leverage on local waste policies. This was demonstrated by the scarcity of references to the documents produced by the RTABs (including the regional waste strategies) in those Waste Local Plans which were examined for this research in the three case study regions of: North West, North East, and Yorkshire and Humber (Davoudi et al, 2005).

5.3 Limited resources and ambivalent mandate

The lack of clear accountability meant that the RTABs’ roles, responsibilities, and powers remained ambivalent. One local government member of RTAB pointed out that, ‘the biggest conflict was about what is our job, what is our role as an RTAB?’ (interview, 2002). While RTABs were seen by some as a technical body producing a technical report, they were considered by others as a strategic body developing a regional strategy. Hence, some argued that, ‘the RTAB can say hard, clinical advice to people, but it can’t put the spin on it to how the region should respond to it’ (interview, 2004). Such an ambivalent mandate was both reflected in and exacerbated by the RTABs’ limited resources. The establishment of RTABs in the context of enhancing regional institutional flexibility stood in direct contrast with their lack of
resources and hence their dependence on state’s financial support. RTABs began their work in the absence of any central funding and a varied degree of support, in terms of finance and staff time, from the Regional Assemblies and their constituent local authorities. There was a unanimous view from those interviewed that the lack of sufficient resources had been a major limiting factor for RTABs in fulfilling their tasks. Limited staff time led to an ‘inability to meet for very long, to do any work because there is too much to do back at the ranch’ (interview, 2002). The overall view was that, ‘it’s all been done on a little bit of shoe string, and people kind of volunteering, along with their day job’ (interview, 2002). The lack of financial resources was a particular problem for RTABs’s work on the regional waste strategies. Gradually it became clear that the work could only be done by employing consultants; that, ‘(RTABS) were getting nowhere until people managed to put together some money and employ a consultant to do the work for (them)’ (interview, 2002). This is in line with the findings from the research funded by the ESRC’s Devolution and Constitutional Programme (Pearce, 2005:18) which suggests that, ‘underpinning the emergence of regional paradigm is the assumption that networked forms of governance equates with ‘better’ decision-making and delivery. However, … there is a lack of resources to facilitate effective collaboration…’.

5.4 Institutional fragmentation at the national level

As mentioned above, the project of institutional up-scaling for management of waste was grounded upon the need for better coordination of splintered regulatory institutions at the local level. However, the new regional structures were being set up in the context of significant fragmentation at the national scale. A House of Commons’ Environmental Audit Committee report, Waste – An Audit, commented
that, ‘criticisms of poor co-ordination on waste policy at central government level litter our evidence’ (EAC, 2003: para 86). The report pointed out that: one ministry [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (DEFRA)] leads responsibility for waste policy, another (Department of Trade and Industry) leads on issues such as producer responsibility, a third [the then Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), now called Communities and Local Government (CLG)] deals with local government and land use planning matters, and a fourth (the Treasury) leads on fiscal instruments. The most unhelpful split has been between DEFRA and ODPM (now CLG). At the time this research was conducted, these two regulatory bodies were almost entirely disconnected from each other with regard to waste issues to the extent that their senior officers were hardly communication with each other. Hence, while the RTABs (who were accountable to the ODPM) were struggling to establish themselves as regional coordinators, DEFRA was busy creating a new regional waste group with overlapping mandates. Thus, attempts by the RTABs to regionally coordinate inter-local relations were being frequently undermined by upstream fragmentation of state regulatory activities which itself reflected the ongoing crisis of spatial structuration.

6. Conclusions

The preceding account has shown that the state experiment with rescaling of waste governance in the 1990s was crisis-induced and provoked by the national state’s struggle to implement the emerging EU-driven waste policies. The project of institutional up-scaling, manifested in the establishment of voluntary regional groups, called RTABs, was part of the state’s strategy to secure a new ‘scalar fix’ for managing the tensions and the crisis-tendencies that were gathering pace under the EU’s supra-national regulatory regime. A key manifestation of this crisis was the
delay in delivery of major waste management infrastructure and hence the inability to meet EU targets particularly with regard to diversion of biodegradable waste from landfill. The combination of: strategic policy vacuum, coordination problems, and institutional fragmentations were seen as major culprits for the slow delivery. Hence, along with the wider process of regionalisation during the 1990s, the waste policy area saw the emergence of regional institution building across England.

While the analyses of the regionalisation of waste, presented in this paper, have confirmed key tenets of the structural and strategic explanations of ongoing transformation of state spatiality (Brenner, 2003), they have, at the same time, added a new dimension to them. Most notably, they have demonstrated that the crisis-induced transformation of environmental governance has indeed renewed important elements of ‘spatial Keynesianism’ which have been considered by some as being ‘retrenched and dismantled’ (Dunford and Kafkalas, 1992; Brenner 2003). Hence, the familiar Keynesian goals of: policy coordination and administrative efficiency; regional strategic planning; and, spatial redistribution, which were the focus of the first wave of metropolitan reforms, have continued to provide key rationales for state rescaling of environmental governance in the second wave of metropolitan reforms. However, as regards the hallmark of spatial Keynesianism, i.e. spatial redistribution, this paper has argued that despite the continuity, there remain two significant differences between the two waves of metropolitan reforms. Firstly, the focus of redistribution has been not on economic benefits but on environmental dis-benefits. Instead of the welfarist redistribution of economic goods the emphasis has been on the redistribution of environmental bads (as understood by Beck’s risk society theory). Within this renewed spatial Keynesianism, while the controversy is, arguably, not about where and how economic resources are to be allocated, it is certainly about where and how
environmental pollution risks are to be redistributed. Secondly, the policy framework within which such redistribution takes place has been initiated by the EU, a supra-national body, rather than the national state. Within this neo-Keynesian approach to rescaling of environmental governance, the nation state is acting predominantly as the agent of the EU; cascading the EU waste regulatory measures down to local governance either directly or through newly created regional institutions. Hence, the parameters of the waste policies in England were set not at the nation state level but at the supra-national level of the EU. Furthermore, the EU requirement for regional self-sufficiency played a major part in making the region the preferred spatial fix.

In this context, regionalisation of waste can be best conceptualised as the state’s ongoing struggle to secure new ‘scalar fixes’ to manage the inter-local tensions over the redistribution of environmental bads, within an EU policy framework. However, the findings presented in this paper confirm Brenner’s suggestion that, ‘this regionally focused rescaling of state institutional structures and forms of regulatory intervention is itself fraught with any number of internal tensions and crisis-tendencies which systematically undermine the capacity of metropolitan institutions to achieve (their) goals’ (2003:310). Indeed, super-imposed regional institutions generate intense struggles between political coalitions, territorial alliances and sectoral interests over the terms of engagement, accountability, legitimacy, and resources. The scale itself becomes a site of political contestation.

To sum up, the key argumentation presented in this paper is that, when the focus of analysis is extended from economic to environmental governance, such as the governance of waste, an alternative interpretation of state spatiality emerges which can be characterised as a form of neo-Keynesianism. This is mainly grounded in the proposition that the current metropolitan reforms have retained rather than abandoned
some of the key features of the earlier waves of state restructuring, notably the spatial redistribution rationale. Having said that, scalar fixes remain temporary partly because the state fails to sustain them in the face of persistent and emerging tensions, some of which being inherent parts of the newly created institutional architectures. The rise of the city-region, which is advocated as the new favourable scale for policy coordination and strategic planning, is an indication of the crisis-tendencies of the previous experiments with English regionalisation, and a sign of ongoing struggle over state spatial and scalar structuration. The crucial point is that as the scale becomes redefined, so does the geometry of social powers, leading to the empowerment of some actors and interests and marginalisation of others.

Acknowledgements
This paper is based on a project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, ‘Regionalisation and the New Politics of Waste’, award number R000239519. I am grateful to the ESRC for this support. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Neil Evans at Leeds Metropolitan University and Dr. Amanda Smith now at Nottingham Trent University, in undertaking the empirical work for the research.
References


EAC (Environmental Audit Committee), Fifth Report of Session 2003-03, Waste – An Audit, HC 99-1, para.86


Regional Studies (2002) Special Issue: Devolution and the English Question, 36(7): 715-797


Incinerator cancer threat revealed, 18 May, p.3


---

Through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004

All interviews were transcribed and submitted to the ESRC Qualitative Data Archive

Including representatives from local authorities, the waste industry, the Environment Agency, regional government offices, regional planning bodies and other ‘statutory consultees’

At the time of writing, the Regional Assemblies and their planning function are in the process of being subsumed into the Regional Development Agencies which are centrally appointed bodies focusing primarily on regional economic development.

‘Municipal waste includes household waste and any other wastes collected by a Waste Collection Authority, or its agents ....’ (DETR, 2000:198).


Another commonly used term if waste-to-energy (WtE)

The most recent waste strategy for England (DEFRA, 2007) has made it clear that EfW incineration should be considered only after the material recovery options (see Figure 1b).

This is partly due to the escalating Landfill Tax which was introduced in 1996 and will increase from £24 per tonne in 2007 to £48 per tonne in 2010.

The term Fordist-Keynesianism refers to the Fordist mode of mass production anchored by the Keynesian welfare state which dominated the post-war economic regulation in the western industrial nations.

This also refers to ‘specialist’ waste management facilities such as hazardous waste treatment and disposal plants.

Ranging from 13 in North West to 31 in Yorkshire and Humber in the early 2000s