



Growth: What Is It Good For?

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‘Good growth in every postcode’

- Reframing of policy? Away from top-down market facilitation towards bottom-up market shaping?
- Pursuit of growth tied firmly to ‘rewiring of the state’ and social justice outcomes?
- But what is ‘good growth’ ? And how do we deliver it in practice?

Our evidence

- Literature review: government policy documents, local authority briefings and policy papers, think tank reports and academic studies.
- 24 semi-structured interviews with elected members, chief executives, local government officers, and local business leaders and SMEs.
- Deep dives into 4 case study authorities:
 - Dundee City Council
 - Neath-Port Talbot Council
 - South Tyneside Council
 - Tamworth Borough Council

Differing policy contexts

- A quick comparison:
 - England: directly elected mayors and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). But LGR pause and review...patchwork quilt?
 - Northern Ireland: Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs), Invest Northern Ireland.
 - Scotland: Regional Economic Partnerships (REPs), national enterprise agencies.
 - Wales: Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), Welsh National Development Agency
- Differing approaches to collaborative governance and council-led policy? But predominance of city-region model? Getting the mix right across the tiers?

Emerging findings

- Place matters but a plurality of ‘places’ across a single locality. And place matters differently depending on the economic sector under consideration?
- City-region or agglomeration strategy does not work for all places, and it may well contribute to uneven development.
- Industrial Strategy and IS8 work as ‘priorities’ but do not provide the policy objectives for the turn to ‘good growth’.

Emerging findings

- Governance of economic development: evidence of delegation, fragmentation and multi-speed collaborations, and capacity imbalances.
- Potential for disconnecting the foundational economy from the economic development policy agenda.
- Attractiveness or competing for inward investment – ‘land rich and land poor’ authorities.

The local in local economies

Risk that not mobilising the resources and tools of local authorities effectively:

- Knowledge of local need – capacity divides between different spheres of governance.
- Organisational capacity of local authorities – progressive procurement.
- Support for start-ups and SMEs – space matters for businesses.
- Relational networks with anchor organisations (for example universities) – convenor and steward of place.
- Local services/infrastructures have a key role to play in economic development.

Local authorities in action

- Business support eco-system - Dundee City Council, business gateway and skills development.
- Community wealth building - South Tyneside Council and the South Tyneside Pledge.
- University partnerships – Neath-Port Talbot Council and development of SWITCH (South Wales Industrial Transition from Carbon Hub).
- Town-centre regeneration – Tamworth Borough Council and its transformation of place.

Conclusions

- Risk that convening powers of local authorities are under-valued in what we might term an integrated regional model.
- Combine focus on priority sectors with programme of initiatives to make places more attractive to all investors.
- Call for more flexible institutional governance, as a check on existing efforts to fit roles and responsibilities into 'neat' tiers of government.
- Recognise that different forms of collaboration between tiers depending on place and sector– requires devolved powers and aligned funding to experiment and innovate in different forms of governance.
- In short, call for move from delegated government and organisational fixes towards devolved collaboration and shared outcomes.

Conclusions

- Strengthening collaborative capacity:
 - Reduce micro-management of local spending, while reconsidering the balance between revenue and capital funding (see Local Growth Fund).
 - Review knowledge sharing and capacity coordination across tiers and authorities.
 - Apply public interest test on procurement to strategic authorities and regional partnerships.
 - Strengthen bottom-up accountability mechanisms between tiers of government.
 - Put in place shared outcomes framework across tiers.

Contact

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Sustainable Island Futures

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Sustainable futures...

- Let us take as our starting point, this emerging model of the city-region or strategic regional model.
- Different combinations of devolved powers, local autonomy and collaboration and coordination.
- Turn now to Scottish Islands and how we think about sustainable futures in this shifting policy context:
 - How do we think about 'place' in and across the Scottish islands?
 - What are the challenges facing island communities?
 - What might sustainable governance look like?

Our evidence

- Literature and policy review.
- 19 interviews.
- Three one-week fieldtrips: Isle of Arran; Orkney Islands; and Shetland Islands.
- Observations.
- Take this opportunity to thank all those involved in the research and all on the Scottish Islands who gave their time to the research.



‘Islandness’

- Unevenness and diversity of geographies, communities, identities and governance systems – within islands, between islands and between islands and other parts of Scotland and its regions.
- Multiple lens or ways of seeing ‘islands’, each with complex dynamics and ambiguous foundations (Foley et al., 2023) .
- Identify and evaluate the political and policy work of multiple efforts to ‘categorise’ islands (Lidderdale, 2026).

Diverse islands but shared challenges?

- Evidence points to repeated challenges taking different forms across the islands:
 - Inequality and Cost of Living - Energy
 - Social care
 - Housing
 - Transport
 - Finance
 - Workforce
 - Population
 - Agriculture and Fishing

Place sensitive policies – the 4As

- ‘Additionality’ or place challenges of delivering services across islands – take for example, gritting, housing repair or burial services.
- ‘Amplification’ or interconnected nature of the challenges – take for example housing and workforce recruitment.
- ‘Ambiguity’ or uncertainty of policies – take for example energy (wind farms) and tourism via cruise ships.
- ‘Application’ or unexpected impacts of nationally-set policies – take for example peat restoration or housing lets.

‘The average is not the actual’ – the dynamics of the 4As

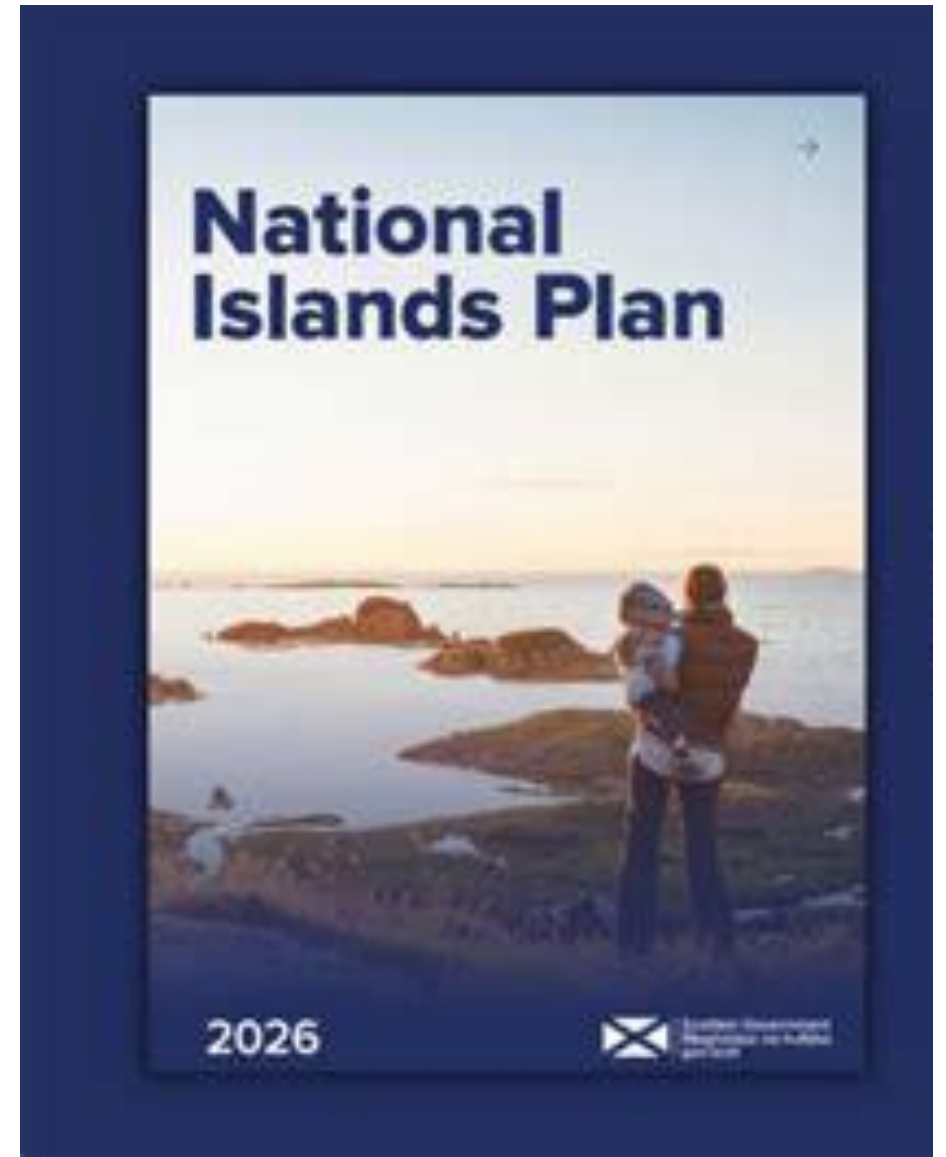
- Can generate perceived injustices (for example, energy prices, yet being involved in energy production).
- Policy and governance challenge of dealing with ‘difference versus similarity’: are issues & challenges facing island communities distinctive, or are they shared with other places and spaces? Probably both? But how to deal with this tension?
- Resourcing: not just finance but skills, organisational capabilities and authority, policy support, decision making autonomy etc. How to empower island communities ‘to do things differently’?

National Islands Plan

To what extent does appeal to ‘distinctiveness’ displace responsibility for action onto islands? And without concrete plans and adequate resources for implementation?

Community Wealth Building (CWB) – how far can it address interconnected problems across different tiers, without shifting responsibilities onto communities and overplaying characteristics of resilience and resourcefulness?

“Don’t romanticise us... we are just a place like all other places” (Interview 14).



Conclusions

- Calls for ‘a bit of wiggle room’ – a constant refrain of interviews.
- Review models of collaborative development for different scales (from the micro to the macro)
- Different things for different places means flexible forms of governance - not either integrated regional or localism but problem-driven innovation accepting of multiple versions of what sustainable growth is and can be.

- Should you have any comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at: steven.griggs@staffs.ac.uk