

The impact of devolution and Brexit on economic citizenship and governance

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Project description:

The Great Unravelling of the global economy since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), reinforced by the imposition of austerity in the Eurozone and the United Kingdom (UK), has led to a period of apparent fracture and shock in the advanced economies. In this environment, the devolution and decentralisation of governmental powers, particularly in the UK, represent some mediating forms of government and governance to re-balance the most centralised economy in the developed world. It is this context that the decision to leave the EU following the Referendum of June 2016 can be used to exemplify the shock to the polity and economy of the UK; a process now referred to as Brexit. A related line of argument has been used to examine the reasons for the election of Donald Trump in the US and the possible election of far-right leaders and much larger electoral representation for their parties in France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands: in 2017 the “new” in Europe is looking increasingly like some atavistic shock.

Brexit appears to be treated as a mono-causal event in which the process of leaving should be straightforward enough, given political will and authority. By the same token, the Leave Vote result was commented on by many public observers as merely as a factor of xenophobia combined with the dissatisfaction of people and places left behind by the EU’s globalizing modernity. Yet the electoral geography is more complex as are the occupational, gender, race and age differences. From this analysis, it was apparent that large swathes of the population voted against something that had increased their economic welfare in the past or their current economic self-interest. So, were these citizens unintelligent or stupid, falling into the insulting Clinton classification of ‘the deplorables’? Clearly not, but the EU may have been crystalized as the emblem of the *status quo* of out-of-touch political elites who imposed lower real wages and worse socio-economic welfare through austerity. In this light, Leave voters were protesting against the decline in the quality of their lives: a rational and certainly not a deplorable response, but possibly and paradoxically hitting the wrong target.

How do we unpick these apparently rational but contradictory forces in respect of how processes of citizenship and systems of governance can mediate and mitigate the impact on territories and communities that been subject to socio-economic shock and a sense of political anomie? Furthermore, has a certain perception of identity caused a disenfranchisement in economic citizenship? These questions form the basis of this proposal to attract applications for this studentship.

A Modest Proposal

The proposal for a PhD studentship is the starting point for an emerging research programme. It is apparent that the socio-economic, political and governmental challenges in the UK and the rest of the EU are constitutionally grounded but spill over legal and jurisdictional boundaries. The key question for this research investigation is how economic

citizenship and governance can be reformed and restructured in order to produce outcomes that are legitimate, accountable and inclusive.

We define economic citizenship as the inclusion of citizens in the allocation, distribution and stabilisation of resources in order to enhance their socio-economic welfare and well-being in the territories they inhabit and shape. In this context, we go on to define governance as the process and practice of attributing public status to intermediary groups between government and civil society (that includes the market) in order to deliver legitimate and accountable policy outcomes for the interest groups they represent.

With regard to the impact of Devolution and Brexit on economic citizenship and governance a number of possible research topics, *inter alia*, present themselves:

- *Resolving the tension between Administrative and Substantive Decentralisation*: the former relates to a top-down hierarchical form of devolution in which central government gives local and regional authorities limited control and resources over some areas of policy. The latter refers to a decentralisation of powers and resources to the most appropriate level of government/governance based upon the principle of subsidiarity. The key question is whether multi-level governance is the appropriate institutional means to sustain and enhance economic citizenship as devolution ebbs and flows in the UK and the rest of Europe;
- *Is Brexit an Error Masquerading as an Opportunity?* The Referendum result and subsequent debate highlight the symbiotic nature of culture, identity and citizenship that for many citizens have fractured. Detangling those links and readjusting the actual purpose of each of the entities could reinvent citizenship. What form of post-Brexit constitutional settlement, underpinning governance institutions, would rescue citizens from disengaged anomie?

These topics are not exclusive so we welcome applications to this studentship from potential students with an interest and some expertise in citizenship, governance and constitutional change, based upon a multi-disciplinary academic formation in the social sciences. The successful student will join a vibrant and growing community of academics and post-graduate students within the *Citizenship and Governance Strategic Research Area* in a University that is open to people, places ideas and methods.