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"Have Scottish dreams diverged from English ideals?"

Danny Dorling – draft spring 2013

"Pity Scotland, so near to England and so far from good" (Diaz, 2012)

Scotland is far from a model society. Occasionally Scottish social statistics shine, as when comparisons are made with educational inequalities in England, but England is hardly a great comparator in most of these cases. For example, the English have the most iniquitous secondary education system among countries of the rich world. Scotland looks good when compared to England as regards education, but that is no great achievement.

In deciding their future people in Scotland need to look beyond comparisons with England and towards what Scotland could be, but they should also worry about what it might become. An independent Scotland could be even further from utopia than is Scotland as a subservient partner in the union. At the same time current selfish trends rising within England may spur many on within Scotland to promote independence to insulate themselves from the cold winds of libertarian neo-liberalism blowing up from London.

The world is changing. I booked my place at the 2013 Edinburgh book festival in December of 2012. Asked to click a nationally I had to make a choice, for the first time in my life, Between English and Scottish. I have never been English before, but there is nothing at all Scottish about me. Reluctantly I ticked English. Maybe those were the only options in earlier years on that website, but it feels different today. It feels as if there is now a real choice being made.

Education – is Scotland aiming higher than England in aspiration for all its children?

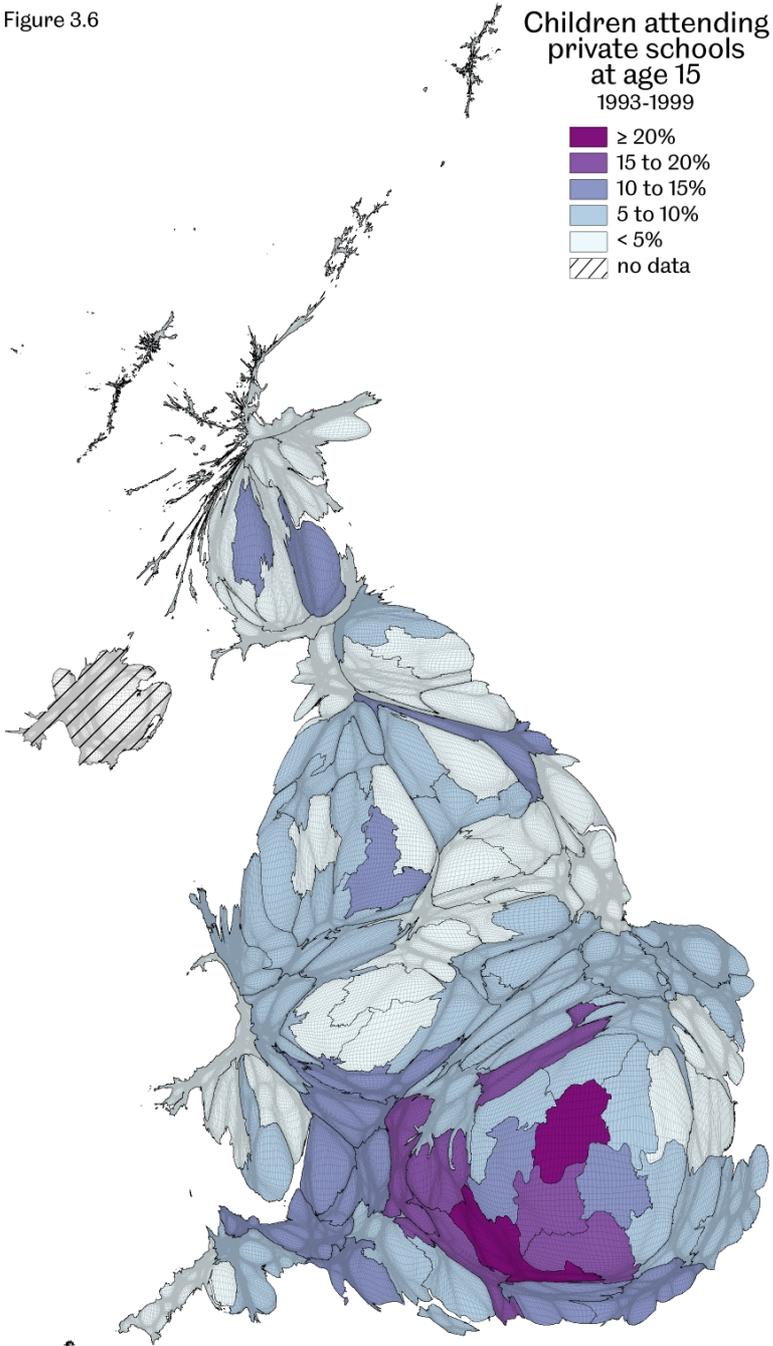
“Currently 23% of British school educational spending goes on the 7% of pupils who are privately educated” (Reay, 2012)

In Britain as a whole almost quarter of spending on secondary school children is spent on just 7% of children. This is not the 7% who are most disadvantaged, but the seven percent who almost all start off in life with some of the greatest advantages. Their families tend to be rich or very rich. They tend to be healthy. They also tend to be well ahead at school when they are young, usually attending a state primary school.

In many affluent OECD countries policy makers have chosen to concentrate education spending on the children who need the most help to lift them up towards the average. In Britain policy makers have chosen to create an educational environment which encourages the most affluent 7% to opt out of the state education system and hence be far less concerned about what happens within it.

Many, if not most people in England are unaware that the elite of Germany and France send their children to state schools, albeit often still a little more elitist state schools. The affluent in Southern England are very often not aware that in much of the rest of England, let alone the UK, very few people send their children to private schools, even amongst the most affluent elsewhere. The map below shows the proportions of children who went to private school up to two decades ago. Today’s map would be very similar. The pattern changes only very slowly over time.

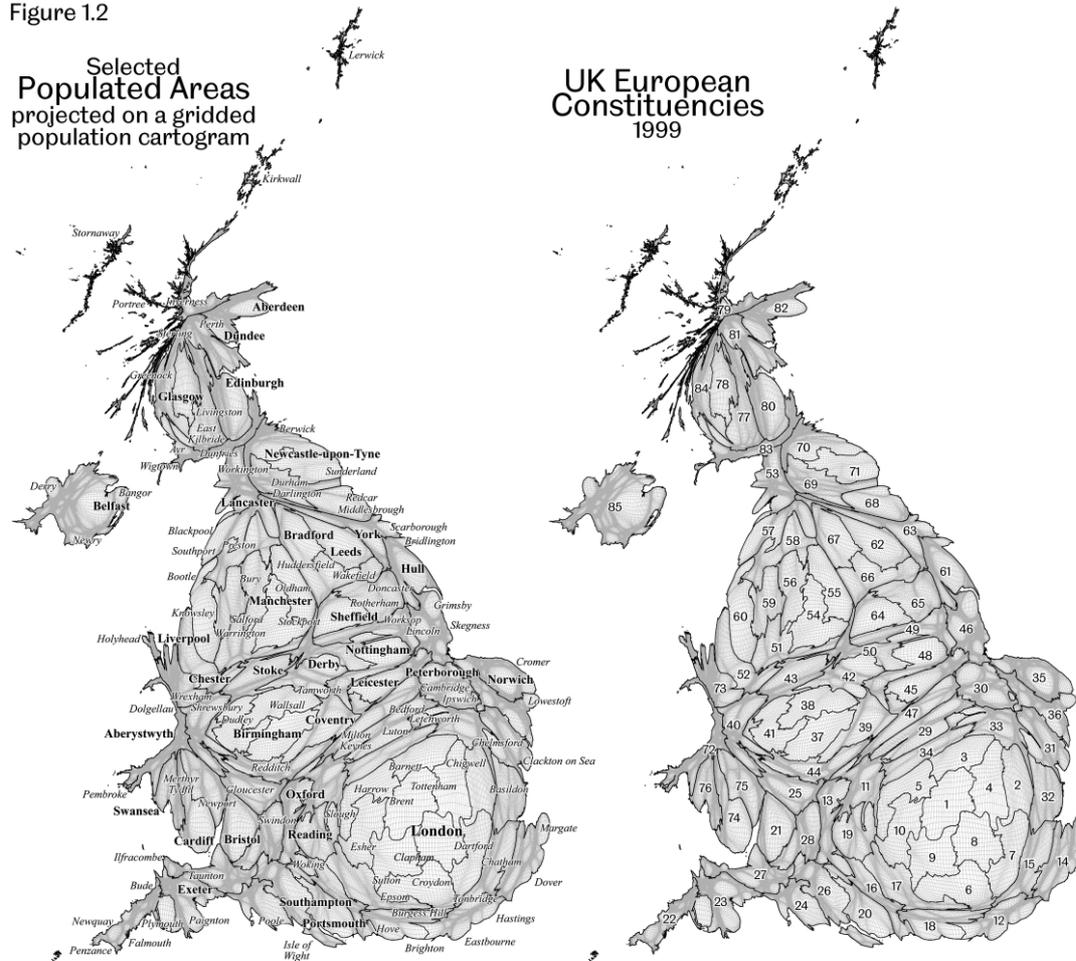
Figure 3.6



Source: Analysis of national school league tables for Britain 1993-99

Figure 1a

Figure 1.2



Source: UK European Constituencies obtained from the House of Commons Research Paper 98/102

Figure 1b

Source: Figures 1a & 1b from Dorling, D. (2013) "The population of the UK", London: Sage.

In Scotland, even in the poorest areas, children do better at school, on average, than do their counterparts in England. Why schools do better in Scotland is not a question this chapter tries to answer. The reasons would range from the more widespread belief, centuries ago, that all people needed to be able to read the bible, to having a less affluent elite who might like to opt out of universal provision, especially in Edinburgh, but who mostly cannot afford to.

One often unanticipated result of Scotland's educational successes is that out of the poorest areas a few young men every year gain good qualification and often leave the neighborhood; often forever. In England in areas that are almost as poor far more of the young men stay, including the most able, because their schools let them down. In a perverse way this has benefited Sheffield Brightside and harmed Glasgow Shettleton, even if it has helped a few of the young men (Garner, 2012).

Scotland's policy on higher education shows an aspiration to be better than England. Last year for the first time in my life I asked my first year students to identify where they were born and not one was born in Scotland. This is from the first cohort to be charged £9000 a year. Of course not a single young adult had left Scotland to come to study in my department. Scotland dreams of being different.

To see an education system to emulate Scotland could do far worse than to look across to Denmark. However, the Danish system took centuries to evolve into what is today a highly cooperative and inclusive model, where the state educates almost all that wish to be educated through to their early twenties, where people are not reliant on (or constrained by) the wealth of their families.

The Danish system requires one of the highest general taxation rates in Western Europe. Scotland has become used to one of the lowest rates of taxation due to decisions made in London. Those decisions are set to reduce corporation tax even further – toward the Western European minimum. They are set to take more and more people on low incomes out of taxation, rather than encourage more firms to pay average incomes and to use that as a better tax base. To move towards an even more inclusive Educational system would require changing much else about Scotland.

Employment – Should every job be a good job or the workless be grateful for any job?

In England unemployment was falling by the end of 2012. It was not that that were new jobs. It was much more than benefits had been increased so little for so long that £9 a day ‘job seekers allowance’ was not a sum many adults could imagine surviving on. People would do almost any work available. Others would work part time rather than not work at all and people would undertake work that, in other countries, a better educated work force would shun.

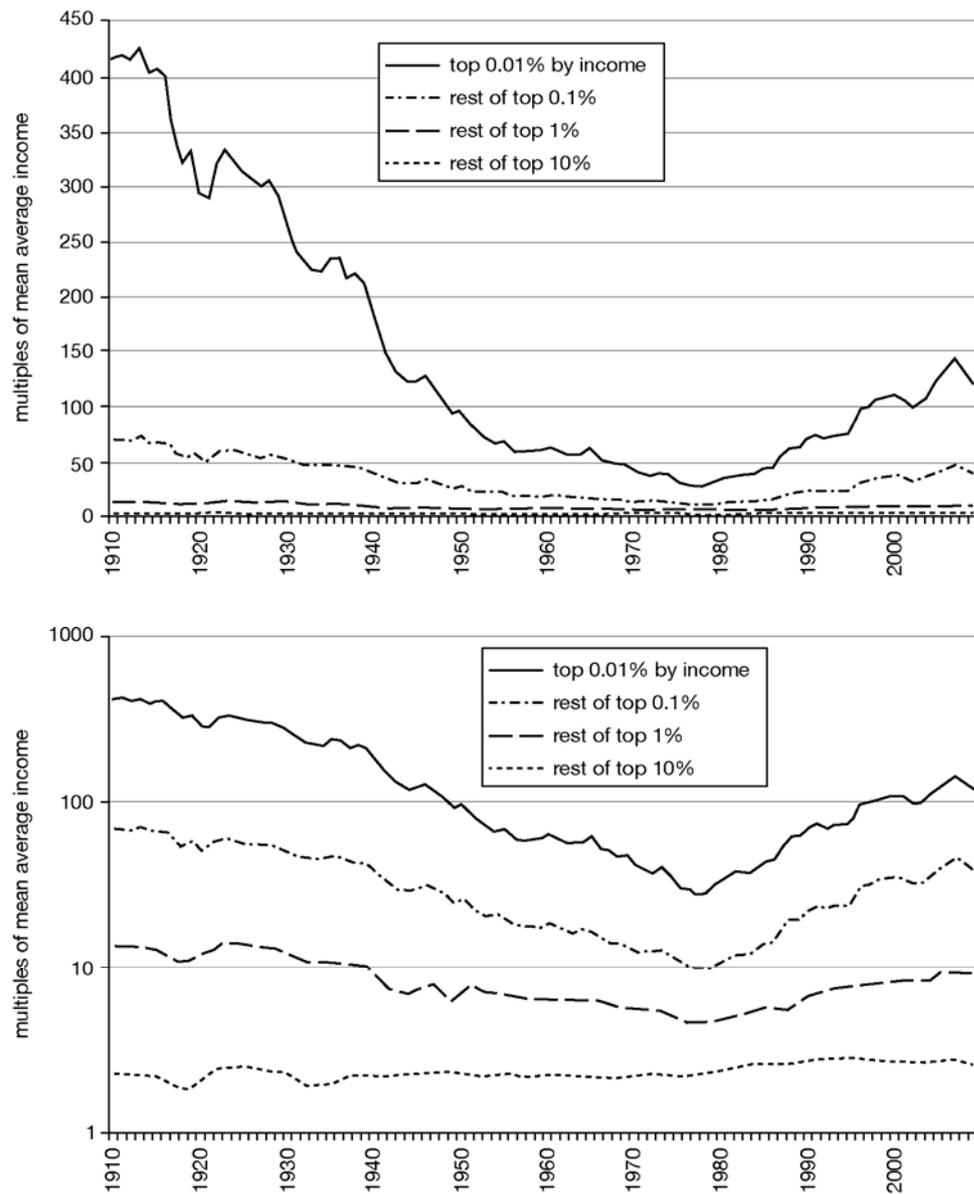
Often the English media presents the English as work-shy, claiming that immigrants come in to do the jobs that the English don’t do. Younger, fitter, and very often better educated immigrants from Eastern Europe are often preferred for work such as caring for the elderly, but it is not lack of enthusiasm that leads to high, if often falling, unemployment in many parts of England, it is lack of money to pay wages. The same may well be true of Scotland. What is more, it is not lack of money overall, in aggregate we have never paid ourselves as much as we do now, in both Scotland and England, it is lack of money for the bottom 90% of people in employment.

The total salary bill in England and Scotland as never been as high as it is now. However, a small number of people receive a disproportionate amount of that bill. If the share of the top 10% were reduced back to what they received in the 1970s, still far more than the other 90%, but not as much more as today, then there would be enough money to pay for full employment (Dorling, 2012). This is not full-employment on the minimum or even living wage, it is full employment on a far more decent wage for many.

Furthermore, if the share of GDP that was taken up by wages rose, and that that was taken by profiteering fell, and even more equitable distributions of incomes could be achieved with salaries at the top remaining static and those at the bottom rising over time. This is what occurred in much of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940, 1960s and almost all

of the 1970s across the UK. But it may not be what the English idea now is. The question here is not about suddenly becoming more equal. It is about what the long term aspiration is.

Fig 2. Incomes of the best-off in the UK 1910-2009 (compared to average, on linear & log scales).



Source: The World Top Incomes Database, missing data interpolated, original source: Atkinson, 2007, <http://g-mond.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/topincomes/> as accessed 11th June 2012.

Britain had full employment when income inequality was lowest (see Figure 2). England may no longer desire that. If Scotland wants to go a different way, then it may need to go its own way and the lines in Figure 2 above will all split in two, the Scots lines falling in an independent and progressively more equal Scotland year on year after 2014, while the line in England continues to rise ever upwards back up to Downton Abbey style 1920s servant keeping levels of inequality.

Housing – Is social housing part of the mix or a safety net for the poorest of the poor?

How we are housed shows how we have come to value one another. We built public housing because we were no longer willing to tolerate slums. We tax large properties a higher amount because that is fair and because it is inefficient to have only one or two people living in a large property. What matters is that we want everyone to be decently housed. However, attitudes to housing are changing.

A Scottish consensus on what is decent and right might be about to collide with a new English idealism that you only ‘deserve’ to be well housed if you have worked hard enough for it, and that people who have more children than ‘they can afford’ should not complain when they have to live in low quality, damp, inadequate housing. It is all they deserve, whereas – in England at least – if someone has property worth a great deal of money, increasingly that is presented as the just reward for honest toil or special ability.

Figure 3. The number of people wealth enough to pay inheritance tax who died by area in 2007/8



Source: Dorling, D. and Thomas, B. (2011) Bankrupt Britain: An atlas of social change, Bristol: Policy Press

The graph above, of the number of estates paying inheritance tax, shows how, in Scotland, housing is much less an issue of wealth than in England. Only three English regions have fewer households wealthy enough to pay inheritance tax and all three of these are far less populous than Scotland. Most of the wealth that is taxed when people die, for the tiny 7% rich enough to pay inheritance tax in the UK, is wealth held in bricks and mortar. Almost all of that wealth is held by a minority of households living in South East England.

In the South of England many people now think of their home as their future financial insurance against the threat of poverty in old age. This is the case despite only a minority of households even there having a mortgage that is mostly paid off, or owning outright. In Scotland (and much of the north of England and in Wales) thinking is different because homes are not worth so much, even for the minority who own

outright. Far more people rent from housing associations, other registered social landlords the council away from the South East of England.

In Scotland the government is “committed to ensuring that by 2012 every unintentionally homeless person will be entitled to settled accommodation.” (Scottish Government, 2012). And the Scottish housing regulator has said that “During 2012 we will develop equalities outcomes and we publish these as part of our overall strategy setting out how we will meet our equalities duties. These will be published by the end of December 2012.” (Scottish Housing Regulator, 2012). Both aspirations may not be met in full or on time, but in comparison to England the difference in attitude is stark.

Health – Can the health of all be improved or is health an individual responsibility?

The Scottish health record is known throughout the rich world for how poor it has been in comparison to other countries. Recently it has been discovered that a decade ago life expectancy for men in the very poorest areas of Glasgow was actually falling. These are the first recorded falls in life expectancy in Britain for any group to be reported since the depression of the 1930s:

“We found that male premature mortality rates rose by over 14% in Scotland over the 10-year period between the early 1990s and 2000s in persistently deprived areas. We found no significant rise in mortality elsewhere in the UK and that the rise among men in Scotland was driven by results for Glasgow where mortality rates rose by over 15% during the decade.” (Norman et al, 2011).

Figure 4: Persistently deprived areas of Glasgow which have seen absolute mortality rises in men



Source: Figure 1: Norman, P. et al (2011) Rising premature mortality in the UK's persistently deprived areas: only a Scottish phenomenon? Social Science and Medicine, 73, pp.1575-1584

Even more recently life expectancy across Scotland rose by more than six months in just one year for both men and women. It is too early to tell, but the tide may finally be turning. What happens to trends in health in Scotland depends as much on what happens to education, employment and housing in the grey areas of the City of Glasgow, outlined above, as on anything else.

Blame people living in these places for their misfortune – as if it were their fault that the housing here was poor and the job prospects still often dire – and in a global economic recession/depression we should expect life expectancy to continue to fall. See the people of these areas as victims of forces outside of their control, and act accordingly and just as the tide was turned in the 1930s, so too it could be turned again, but there is a problem.

The problem with introducing a more and more progressive health policy in Scotland is that it runs counter to what is becoming the new common sense in much of southern

England. The government in London increasingly blames those who are ill for their illnesses. It does not want to look for the reasons behind the reasons that people smoke and drink, why some get fatter than others or why the British are more likely to be obese than almost any other set of people in Europe. The government in England preaches the gospel of individual responsibility. In doing so it glances up at the health record of Scotland with disdain.

In England health care is being privatized. In Scotland it remains nationalized. The English privatization may only have been possible because opposition from the other countries of the UK was muted as, at first, it looks as if English “health reforms” would only affect England. That was a mistake.

The American private health care companies moving into England will already be looking enviously north of the border for the huge profits that could be made introducing ‘competitive’ out-patients schemes, general practitioner provision, and other ‘services’. The members of the House of Lords who voted the health privatization bill through so enthusiastically in 2012, many in the pay of private health care ‘providers’ as company directors or advisors, are unlikely to ignore their financial masters’ need to expand into Scotland.

To be truly safe from English privatisation and profiteering Scotland may come to believe that it requires the ultimate legal safeguard – independence. If not now, then soon. If and when that comes about then perhaps it would be best to:

Pity England, so near to Europe and so far from fair

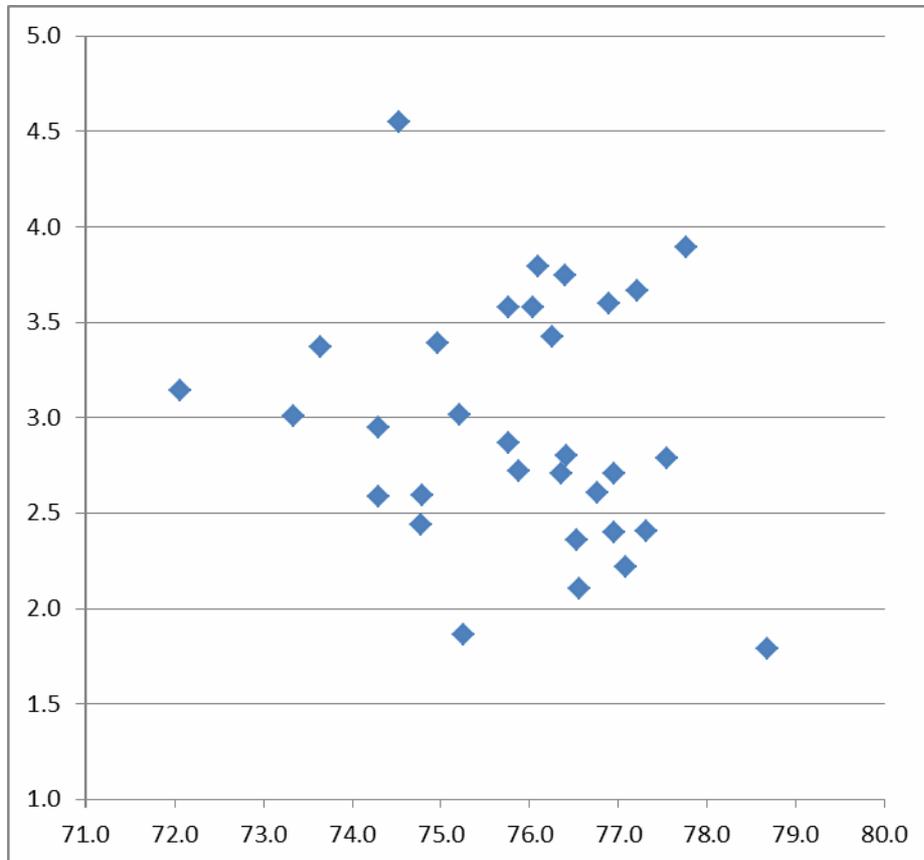
Inequality and Exclusion within Scotland

Being the second largest nation in the union, a “region” of the UK until only recent rhetorical change has had the effect of obscuring inequalities within Scotland.

Scotland contains areas with the lowest life expectancies in the United Kingdom, but it is also (although far less famously) known for its enclaves of areas where people enjoy far better health than most people in the UK. If it were not for such good health in some parts of Scotland the national average life expectancy would be far lower.

Since 1997 there has been a slight equalization of health inequalities within Scotland. Life expectancy in Glasgow rose by 3.1% to stand at 74.3 for men and women combined by 2007-09. In contrast, the improvement in East Renfrewshire over the same period was of just 1.8% although people there still live almost 6 years longer than in Glasgow today (GRO Scotland, 2013). This is what a decline in health inequalities looks like, and it has occurred while Scotland was still part of the union, but with a devolved administration and a party in control in Westminster that contained a great many Scottish MPs. There is no guarantee that this trend will continue either with a different set of parties in power in Westminster since 2009, or if Scotland were to leave the union.

Figure 5: Life Expectancy in 1997-99 and % change to 2007-9 by Scottish Council areas



Source: (GRO Scotland, 2013).

Although there is a great deal of variation in Figure 5, in general the further you look to the right, where life expectancy was higher in the late 1990s, the lower each blue diamond is. Each diamond represents one of Scotland’s council areas. The highest is West Lothian, which has experienced the greatest advantage and improvement in its relative position over the course of the last decade. The lowest diamonds, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire, are the two areas which saw the least improvement. It is possible that this is because these areas in earlier decades benefitted from people leaving Glasgow to move to them and that such migration has reduced a little as conditions within Glasgow improved.

An independent Scotland could well become a country in which the issues of redistribution within the land rise to the fore. Would people in the areas to the right of the scatter shown in Figure 5 begin to resent the continued higher public spending that tends to be the case in areas to the left of Figure 5. The areas are deliberately not labeled on the Figure to keep this question hypothetical, but as soon as you see where we are talking about, and if you know Scotland well, you might begin to see how this issue could become important.

As things stand within the union Scotland as a whole receives more funding per head than do people in England. Much of that extra funding is used, in effect, to improve living conditions in some of the poorest parts of Scotland. The transfer of monies is, in effect, from wealthier tax payers in England to poorer parts of Scotland, especially Glasgow. Even if Scotland could secure rights to all the oil fields that lie off its coast, and could resist English attempts to draw a diagonal line out to sea as some continuation of the land boarder up towards Norway, higher funding per head in places like Glasgow could become seen as a transfer from wealthier parts of Scotland in future. A very imaginative government could present it as funding from wealthier parts of the North Sea, but for only as long as profits from there continued.

Now extend the argument from health to education, housing, jobs and the environment. Add the costs of supporting populations in very low dense mountainous areas and islands, the costs of ferries and train lines, the costs of protecting the natural environment, preserving some of the oldest Universities in Europe and weigh those costs against the needs of people in “middle Scotland” (a term which will not mean the central belt). For decades when too little has been spent on the poor, on benefits, or on hospitals or schools in Scotland it has been because the national arrangement with England has been to blame, or at least it could be presented in that way. The Barnett formula has not been fair compensation for the oil. Take that argument away and the question then becomes: which old fault lines will re-emerge and which new ones will form?

All the arguments made here are only a great problem if a large component to Scottish identity has been identity formed as a counter to English domination. That part of Scottish identity that builds on solidarity, mutual understanding and the sense that you do well when everyone around you does well could be used to mobilize action to prevent economic and ideological divides growing were Scotland ever to become independent again.

One area the urgently requires more work is an assessment of change in Scotland since devolution in comparison to say change in the North East of England or across all of Yorkshire. The improvement of the housing stock, changes in health, gains in education since the trend before and after devolution may all appear, I suspect, to generally suggest that devolution can be linked to an era of falling inequality in contrast to rising inequalities in nearby parts of England. The health trends shown above in Figure 5 suggest that is the case. It is harder to compare educational trends because of such different systems and now differing university funding. Comparison of the changes found between the 2001 and 2011 census north and south of the border might well suggest that when more decisions are made more locally more has been achieved.

The implications of findings from analyses of the 2011 census on the possible benefits of the devolution period could well be used to suggest that under independence even greater progress could be achieved. However, it may be just as valid to claim that as significant achievements have been made without independence then independence is neither either necessary or sufficient for greater social progress, solidarity and the future reductions of inequalities. In the short term the implications of the tsunami of budget cuts to services in both Scotland and the north of England are likely to dominate the debate, and many people living far from London in both England and Scotland may well blame Westminster and the bankers of London. In the long term there will still be bankers in Edinburgh and it is not hard to imagine them, and the government there, increasingly be blamed for the woes of the West and North of Scotland.

Conclusion

This chapter has contrasted trends in the four areas of Education, Employment, Housing and Health, at times using geographical data, to suggest that a widening of the gap in ideals and aspirations may be occurring between Scotland and England, including perhaps in how people are viewed as possibly all part of a society (Scotland), or needing to know their place better in a social order that will always separate out winners and losers (England). Such a summary may stereotype too much, but hopefully illustrates where we may be currently heading and how we may be becoming much more 'us' and 'them' than we used to be.

What may matter most for Scotland is not whether to vote for or against Independence, but what direction an independent Scotland might take. An Independent Scotland which was not genuinely a Scotland dedicating to returning to a system of values that saw everyone as valuable may not be a Scotland worth fighting for Independence for. Finally, while Independence might make Scotland far more legally separate from England it would not alter the basic geography. Mexico still suffers from neighbouring the United States despite not being subject to its direct laws and dictat.

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