

Connecting Spatial and Economic Evidence Bases: the spatial economics perspective

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State of the Region 2008 – connecting spatial planning and economic
development evidence bases, West Midlands Regional Observatory,
Workshop, September 2008:

The logo for the London School of Economics (LSE), consisting of the letters 'LSE' in white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a red square background.

Two Personal Points of Entry

Points of entry:

- Experience/puzzlement in late 1960s Regional Economic Planning Councils (SW)
 - What's a strategy about – unless simply:
 - Getting jobs in (north)
 - Getting houses built (WM and SE)
- Role in new LSE-based Spatial Economics Research Centre
 - Dual concern for :
 - advancing understanding of how space matters economically – at scales from neighbourhood to broad region
 - contributing actively to policy-making by extension of the evidence base and critical analysis of policy assumptions/.effectiveness:
 - first two policy papers available at www.spatial-economics.ac.uk

Two Broad Issues to Discuss

- What we mean/should mean by developing the evidence base ?
- What is involved in connecting the spatial and economic dimensions of regional strategies/evidence bases

Connecting Evidence and Policy

- Evidence-based policy as cliché rather than reality
 - Between ‘policy-based evidence’ and post-policy ‘targetry’
- Cannot be simply a matter of accumulating data:
 - The question is ‘evidence’ of what?
 - What we need are usable/credible stories about how the system in question functions/interacts with available levers
- 3 priorities:
 - Identifying/excavating assumptions of policy-makers and analysing/empirically testing
 - Applying theoretical expectations from research literature in a systematic way to the regional context – and seeing how far they do/don’t fit (empirically) and why
 - Looking hard / critically at the question whether interventions have significant positive impacts – persuading policy-makers to design these into implementations – looking hard at wider research literature – and thinking about sources of unintended secondary effects

Linking Spatial/Economic Dimensions

- Cannot be simply matter of combining data-bases
 - Or even of devising suitable hierarchical structures for nesting areas/diff types of analysis
 - Rather need to start from understanding (modelling?) of the key **processes** reflected in each, identifying:
 - Different ways in which proximities affect various kinds of economic processes
 - How economic choices, relations, processes shape changing spatial outcomes (demography,
 - Focusing particularly on interactions:
 - Labour markets
 - Housing/property markets
 - Spatial divisions of functions within the region
 - Taking markets seriously both for realism and to Identify specific aspects of market (and government) failure for attention -
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Putting This into Practice

- Deliberately focused on very simple / general arguments
 - Not technical questions of how we integrate data / analyses
- Rationale is that both potential and difficulty of integration follow from the challenge it poses:
 - to (eventually) take processes – and assumptions about these – more seriously
 - Get policy-makers to be a lot clearer about what they expect, believe and intend
- Clearly a lapsed civil servant's perspective – but SERC is very keen to contribute supportively to further development of capacity to pursue more difficult/relevant approaches to linking evidence with spatial/economic policies