Guest Editorial on the Brexit Issue

By Alex de Ruyter, Centre for Brexit Studies, UK and Guest Editor of this Issue's Regional Insigths section

As the process of Brexit – that is, the United Kingdom's attempt to leave the European Union (EU) – grinds on, this special issue of 'Regions' takes a look at various socio-spatial dimensions of this tortured dynamic. In so doing, we can consider Brexit (and other so-called 'populist' manifestations of anti-globalisation sentiment such as the presidency of Donald Trump in the US) as an attempt to re-establish or reconfigure borders. For Trump of course, this has most poignantly taken place in his attempt to literally build a wall along the US-Mexico border and put "America First".

In the UK, as Sally Tomlinson and Danny Dorling argue convincingly in this issue, "[t]he current long and contentious discussions over the form that Brexit and future global trade will take *demonstrates a reluctance to engage not only with*

our past, but also with the 21st century realities of our future" (emphasis added). In the opening piece of this issue, Tomlinson and Dorling further examine this proposition by considering the link between the Brexit vote and the UK education system.

Of course, for supporters of Brexit in the UK, the totemic issue has become the status of the Northern Ireland (NI) border with the Republic of Ireland, and the EU's concerns to ensure that any withdrawal agreement with the UK only occurs on the guarantee that no 'hard border' is re-established. Indeed, at the time of writing, given the UK Government's manifest failure to square the circle in wanting to leave the EU Customs Union, yet "avoid" a hard border in NI, it remains problematic to see how a withdrawal agreement could even be reached.

However, Northern Ireland is not the only part of the UK (and associated Crown Dependencies or Overseas Territories) to share a land border with an EU state. Gibraltar shares a border with Spain, and sovereignty issues are just as problematic here in terms of the future economic relationship. Accordingly, this issue then follows with Arantza Gomez Arana, who considers the problems related to the re-establishment of a hard border between Gibraltar and Spain.

Speaking of "closed borders", we then follow with an analysis of one of the factors that was believed to be key in the UK's Brexit vote; that of migration from other EU countries. In this critical piece, Salvatore Perri argues that despite popular conceptions, there was no evidence to suggest that EU migration was having deleterious effects on the UK economy. Rather, Perri argues that without the stimulus of migration, the UK will suffer the effects of an ageing population in terms of its impact on public finances and productivity.

Whilst much has been written about Brexit at the sub-national, or 'home nation' (i.e., NI, Scotland) level, less has been put forward on impact at the local level. Accordingly, Christopher Huggins examines the impact on Local Authorities in England. Huggins argues that this is important because the EU in effect has served as a vehicle to boost funding to compensate for the decline in monies received from the UK Government. Under EU law, local authorities have also had a statutory right to consultation on matters that affect them, in the form of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). Going forward, Huggins argues, there is no clarity on what will replace these.

David Hearne and Alex de Ruyter then examine the potential impact of Brexit on agriculture and environmental standards. They argue that agriculture is heavily affected by state intervention and hence that Brexit could lead to a significant realignment of UK farming. This is because once out of the EU, the UK will come under pressure to realign its so-called Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) standards that regulate the nature of the food we eat, towards that of countries (principally the US) that it wishes to pursue trade agreements with.

Marlen Komorowski then examines the likely impact of Brexit on the UK media industry. She points out that London, in addition to being the EU's premier financial hub, is also its premier media hub. In this context, Komorowski argues that exiting the EU's (Digital) Single Market could result in the loss of business. This would occur as international media companies currently located in London could migrate part or all of their business to other EU capitals so as to ensure continued status as EU broadcasters under the Audo-Visual Media Services Directive's country-of-origin provisions.

Finally, David Bailey considers the likely impact of a 'No Deal' Brexit on the UK automotive sector. Bailey argues that given the "just in time" nature of manufacturing supply chains, any reintroduction of border checks would have a disruptive influence on the sector and increase costs. Longer term, plants could close in the UK as jobs and investment are diverted to other EU countries. For Bailey, such developments could only be mitigated by the adoption of more place-based policy measures (e.g., to promote "reshoring") over the long term, which links to wider debates on regional resilience.

This section includes also a contribution from Jason Deegan. Rather than analysing a no-deal Brexit as a shock to Ireland Jason casts a more critical eye on the shortfalls of regional policy within Ireland, and more specifically how Ireland's already existent regional imbalances will only further come into focus due to the disruption caused by a no-deal Brexit.

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