

The Portrayal of the North-South Divide in the British Press

Alice Tihelková

ABSTRACT

In recent decades beginning with the 1980s, Britain has witnessed a rise in inequality accompanied by a decline in social mobility. In the course of this process the historical North-South division and its aspects have become more prominent. While the South in general has grown more affluent, the North has suffered the consequences of the closure of traditional industries in the 1980s and struggled with mass unemployment and lower living standards. The purpose of the paper is to analyse the coverage of the North-South divide by the British press, namely four major national dailies (The Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent and The Daily Mail) as well as BBC News. The analysis is based on five indicators of the quality of life (life expectancy, poverty, education and skills, employment, housing) as postulated by social geographer Danny Dorling. The paper aims to demonstrate whether and how the portrayal of the divide is influenced by the political leanings of the individual media outlets.

KEYWORDS

North-South divide, deindustrialization, inequality, recession, unemployment, public sector

1. Background to the Divide

The North-South divide, the existence of two economically, socially and culturally distinct parts of Britain, has been a key element of regional identity for centuries, reaching back to the period of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The significance of the divide became more distinct during the rapid industrialization of the North within the process of the Industrial Revolution. The bulk of Britain's 19th-century industrial output - centred on export-based industries like textiles, coal-mining, engineering and shipbuilding - was situated in the northern counties. The South, on the other hand, remained agricultural, also specializing in trade, banking, finance and government due to the advantages yielded by its geographical location and by the presence of London.

Despite the undesirable effects brought on by industrialization, for example pollution, filth and urban squalor, the North of the 19th century was regarded as the more dynamic and prosperous of the two regions, the heartland of Britain's expanding economy.¹ Whereas the South periodically struggled with unemployment caused by agricultural depression and the decline of traditional handicrafts, there was plenty of work in the cotton mills of Lancashire, the shipyards of Northumberland and the coal fields of Yorkshire. Following the First World War, however, this dynamism and prosperity appears to have been lost to the South as a result of the decline of the British Empire, the emergence of international economic competition and the shifted focus on new industries situated in the South.

1 Ron Martin, "The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 13 (Wiley, 1988), 391, accessed July 24, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/622738>.

The idea of the North as a region that once held economic advantage over the South has been challenged by British geographer Ron Martin. In his article "The Political Economy of Britain's north-south divide,"² Martin argues that while the largest volume of industrial employment in the 19th century was indeed situated in the North of Britain, the region was far from homogeneous. The bulk of lucrative industry was situated in an area he calls the "industrial heartland" (West Midlands, North West and Yorkshire-Humberside), whereas the rest of the northern territory (Wales, Scotland) formed an "industrial periphery". In addition, the export-based character of Britain's industrial system resulted in the intrinsic instability of the industrial regions, which suffered periodic waves of unemployment depending upon the ups and downs of overseas trade.³ Thus it can be claimed that an economic imbalance was present in the North well before the 20th-century shocks to Britain's industry. The region seems to have always shown a greater economic and social vulnerability.

This vulnerability gained urgency during the course of the twentieth century, first during the years of the Great Depression and subsequently in the 1980s during the process of large-scale de-industrialization implemented by the Thatcher administration. With the elimination of staple industries (coal, steel, shipbuilding), resulting in mass unemployment, increased welfare dependency and urban decay in the northern industrial regions (a theme depicted in films such as *Billy Elliot* and *Brassed Off*, the TV series *Boys from the Blackstuff* and the Ken Loach documentary on the miners' strike *Whose Side Are you On?*), the overall inequality between the North and the South became far more prominent.

The re-orientation of the economy under Thatcher brought a massive advantage to the South. Admittedly, the shift from manufacturing to services had already been under way in the 1960s and 1970s, but during those two decades the growth involved predominantly public sector services (health, education) and took place across Britain. However, since the Thatcher administration the expansion has been of private sector services (banking, the leisure industry, professional services of various types), which have for the most part been situated in the South.

The increase in employment opportunities in the South has led to the migration of those qualified in banking, business, IT and other professions to the region, not only in search of a higher income but also of a better quality of life. Geographer Doreen Massey, who studies the relationship between geography and class in Britain, has noted of this process: "The more recent colonization of this region has been led by the middle class, seeking out the image of a gentrified existence in this manicured, supposedly rural setting, amid all the imagery of a socially settled village past in a landscape of church spires and cricket pitches which has so often been held up to typify 'England'. Thus they establish their claim to have 'arrived'."⁴

However, the consequences of the growing inequality have not been suffered by the Northerners only. The "colonisation" of well-to-do people in the South has increased the cost of living in the region, an effect which has had an adverse impact on the low-earning sections of the southern population. The rising prices of houses and rented accommodation have made decent housing unaffordable to large numbers of people on below-median incomes (including the immigrant population, who are situated mainly in London and the South-east), with sub-standard accommodation in overcrowded inner

2 Martin, "The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide," 389-394.

3 Martin, "The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide," 389-394.

4 Doreen Massey, "A New Class of Geography," *Marxism Today*, May 1988, 13, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/MarxismToday-1988may-00012>.

city estates often representing the only option. In addition, London has the highest rate of homelessness in the UK. Therefore, despite its overall wealth and economic advantage over the North, the South is home to populations suffering from considerable social exclusion and deprivation.

Danny Dorling, Professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield and a leading expert on regional inequality in Britain, has demonstrated in his pioneering research that the North-South divide is currently growing wider in a number of socio-economic parameters. To measure the quality of life in both regions, Dorling has used the indicators Life expectancy, Poverty, Education and skills, Employment and Housing.⁵

These five indicators thematically correspond to the “five giants” (disease, want, ignorance, idleness and squalor) identified by the 1941 Beveridge Report, a document that laid the foundations of the post-war British Welfare State.⁶ According to Dorling, the absence of these five negative factors translates into high life expectancy, low rates of poverty, good employment qualifications, low work-related benefit claims and reasonable house prices.⁷ The categories proposed by Dorling will form the basis of the analysis presented in this paper.

2. Analysis of Press Coverage

2.1 Sources and Objectives

To obtain an overview of the coverage of the North-South divide in the British press, five sources have been selected. Four of them are represented by the websites of major UK national dailies - *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Mail*. In addition, the website of *BBC News* was also included as the fifth source. The selection of sources reflected the need to have the widest possible spectrum of political opinion represented – from right-leaning (*The Telegraph*) to left-leaning (*The Guardian*). By the inclusion of *The Daily Mail*, the tabloid press is represented.

For the purposes of this paper, a corpus of 100 articles published between the years 2008-2012 was obtained from the above-mentioned sources by means of the search phrase *North South divide*. Using the method of content analysis,⁸ the corpus was studied with the following objectives in mind:

- a) to establish how the existence of the North-South divide is presented in the articles
- b) to see whether/how Dorling’s five categories are presented
- c) to identify the differences in coverage among the individual sources and to see how they correlate with the ideological bias of the sources

The analysis is divided into five parts, corresponding to Dorling’s indicators.

5 Danny Dorling, “Persistent North-South Divides,” *The Economic Geography of the UK* (London: Sage, 2010), 12-28.

6 David Kynaston, *A World to Build. Austerity Britain 1945-48* (London; Bloomsbury, 2008), 21.

7 Dorling, “Persistent North-South Divides,” 24.

8 See Jim Macnamara, “Media Content Analysis: Its Uses, Benefits and Best Practice Methodology,” *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* 6.1 (2005), accessed August 5, 2012, <http://snap3.uas.mx/RECURSO1/Libros/Electronicos/BIBAS%20PE-RIODISMO%20%20DIGITAL/ART%D6CULOS/Media-Content-Analysis-Paper.pdf>.

2.2 Life Expectancy

According to Dorling, the differences in life expectancy between the South (higher expectancy) and the North (lower expectancy) repeat an old pattern of inequality that has been gaining strength in recent years. As demonstrated by Dorling on the basis of data on mortality from the years 2006 -2007, the inequalities in health between these two regions have returned to the relative levels of inequality that were last observed in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹

Similar to Dorling, the corpus material identifies life expectancy (subsuming health) as a key indicator of the divide, expressing alarm at the growing inequalities in the length and quality of life on each side. In his *Daily Mail* article, for instance, Steve Doughty quotes data from the *Office for National Statistics* (ONS) indicating that the life-expectancy gap between the affluent suburban areas and the deprived housing estates is steadily increasing. Although deprivation, just as affluence, can be found both North and South, the life expectancy gap largely corresponds geographically to the North-South divide. Thus, according to the ONS figures, while in a prosperous area like Kensington, London, the present life expectancy amounts to over 84 years for boys and 89 for girls, in some of the least healthy areas such as Glasgow and Clyde, the expectancy is only under 73 for boys and 79 for girls, making for a life expectancy gap of over 10 years.¹⁰

Other sources claim that the difference is even bigger. Writing for *The Independent*, Liam O'Brien argues in his article "People in Wealthy Regions Live 20 Years Longer Than Those in the Deprived Areas" that the gap can be as wide as two decades. In addition, he quotes the concerns of Paul Hackwood, the chair of the trustees for the Church Urban Fund, over the extent of social division based on location: "We live in one of the most unequal countries in the Western world, where babies born within a few miles of one another can have widely differing life expectancies."¹¹ The belief that social inequality is the primary cause of the life expectancy gap is shared by most of the sources; the only source that largely avoids the discussion of these causes is *The Telegraph*.

Closely related to life expectancy is the issue of health, with the North again portrayed as a region where the state of public health is significantly worse than in the affluent South (the most extensive coverage of the phenomenon being provided by *The Daily Mail* and *BBC News*). The poorer health of the Northerners is presented as a result of the adverse economic situation of the North, with a wide range of concomitant problems impacting the population. Thus, in addition to the lower living and housing standards, a higher occurrence of alcohol and drug abuse has been reported, as well as higher rates of stress and depression-related conditions, the data on the latter being obtained on the basis of prescription rates for antidepressants. As reported by *BBC News*, the "unhappiest" places (i.e. those showing the highest rate of anti-depressant prescription) are to be found predominantly in the North, in such locations as Blackpool, Newcastle, Sunderland, Darlington and Durham.¹²

9 Dorling, "Persistent North-South Divides," 17.

10 Stephen Doughty, "Why the UK Financial Divide Means Those in the South Are 25% More Likely to Live to 75," *The Daily Mail*, June 9, 2011, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2000923/Why-UK-financial-divide-means-South-25-likely-live-75.html>.

11 Liam O'Brien, "People in Wealthy Regions Live 20 Years Longer Than Those in Deprived Area," *The Independent*, May 21, 2012, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/people-in-wealthy-regions-live-20-years-longer-than-those-in-deprived-areas-7769682.html?origin=internalSearch>.

12 Mark Easton, "The North/South Divide on Antidepressants," *BBC News*, August 2, 2012, accessed August 23, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-19076219>.

The decreased life expectancy in the North is shown to have been significantly contributed to by the high consumption of alcohol in the region, with liver diseases on the rise by 25% in the past decade. Reporting on the issue, the BBC quotes the concerns of Eric Appleby, chief executive of Alcohol Concern: "This report shows that loss of life through alcoholic liver disease remains as big a problem as ever, with a worrying tendency for those with the highest deprivation to suffer most, leading to a distinct north/south divide."¹³ The paper thus correlates alcohol abuse with deprivation, portraying alcohol consumers largely as victims of social inequality.

Finally, some of the sources link the poorer health of the Northerners to their "unhealthy" food shopping habits. As reported by *The Daily Mail*, shopping baskets in the North are more likely to contain convenience snack food with high fat and sugar content such as crisps, ice-cream, flavoured milk or processed meat nuggets, whereas Southerners on the whole appear to be more diet-conscious and likely to opt for organic food and fresh produce. In the article "The Junk Food Divide: North Spends Least on Fruit and Vegetables," the *Daily Mail* journalist Simon Poulter claims that the North spends on average 22% less on fruit and vegetables than the South.¹⁴ Social deprivation, in particular the unaffordability of healthier foods, is blamed. The possibility that culinary conservatism among the working-class communities of the North may play a part in their shopping habits is not given any consideration by the sources.

Of all the media sources, life expectancy and health as indicators of the North-South Divide are given the most extensive coverage in the *Daily Mail* and *BBC News*, with an occasional mention by the *Independent* and the *Guardian*. By contrast, *The Daily Telegraph* devotes no significant amount of attention to the issue.

2.3 Poverty

Poverty as an indicator of the North-South divide is treated by more or less all of the sources, but the presentation thereof is usually accompanied by other key factors (most often employment and housing) rather than as a separate issue. The two sources that devote the most attention to poverty are the two left-leaning news organizations *The Guardian*, which featured a series of articles by Danny Dorling on regional inequality, and *The Independent*. *The Independent* presents the trope of a long term North-South divide in relation to poverty, placing special emphasis on the high level of child poverty. Two locations that symbolize the extremes of the divide are Toxteth, a borough close to the centre of Liverpool where 62 per cent of children are reported to live in poverty, and at the other end of the spectrum Camberley in Surrey, where this figure is only 6 per cent. Writing for *The Guardian*, Daniel Dorling modifies this view, arguing that some areas of the South show the same levels of deprivation as the North, especially due to the high cost of living and unaffordable housing in the South. "The largest concentration of poverty in Europe is in London," he warns.¹⁵

13 Helen Briggs, "Liver Disease Deaths Reach Record Levels in England," *BBC News*, March 22, 2012, accessed 23 July 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-17465403>.

14 Simon Poulter, "The Junk Food Divide: the North Spends Least on Fruit and Vegetables," *The Daily Mail*, July 10, 2009, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1198735/The-junk-food-divide-North-spends-fruit-vegetables.html>.

15 David Ward, "The North-South Divide Moves North," *The Guardian*, October 24, 2007, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/oct/24/britishidentity.socialexclusion?INTCMP=SRCH>.

In addition, much of the coverage of poverty focuses on the austerity measures undertaken by the Coalition government under the leadership of David Cameron. There is an agreement among the sources that the measures will – or indeed already have – hit the North harder than the South. This is due to the higher dependence of the North on state spending, which is now being reduced in order to cut Britain’s budget deficit. Thus, it can be expected that the present austerity period will create an even wider gap in living standards between the North and the South (see 2.5 below).

2.4 Education and Skills

Predictably, the most extensive coverage of education as an indicator of the North-South divide is provided by *The Guardian*, a paper known for its frequent reporting on educational inequality. Like the previous indicators, education statistics show the unfavourable position of the North. To demonstrate the educational advantages of the South, *The Guardian* uses data on the number of A grades awarded at A-level examinations, a figure published annually by examination boards. For instance, in her article “A Level Results: Record Year for A Grades That Highlights North-South Divide,” editor Polly Curtis reports that in 2008, the increase in A grades against the previous year was three times higher in the South, amounting to 6.1 per cent as compared to 2.1 per cent in the North.¹⁶ According to *The Guardian*, the higher success rate of pupils in the South can be ascribed to the fact that the region contains a greater number of independent and selective schools than the North, and it is to students from these well-performing schools that the A grades are most often awarded. Traditionally an advocate of non-selective comprehensive schooling, *The Guardian* presents the presence of “elitist” schools as a factor exacerbating the North-South divide in the field of academic achievement.

In addition to differences in exam results, *The Guardian* reports on more general aspects of the educational divide, especially the lack of qualifications in the North and the brain drain affecting the region. Reporting on the results of a human geography survey, the paper quotes its author Danny Dorling: “Education came next. We looked at who has degrees and who has no qualifications. The area where the majority of people have no qualifications is the north. People with degrees tend to migrate southwards and there is a huge cluster of qualified people south of the line.”¹⁷ The paper expresses concern that such loss of a qualified workforce, if left unaddressed, will be a major contributor to the deepening of the divide in the future.

Apart from *The Guardian*, the remaining sources make almost no reference to education as an indicator of the North-South divide. The interest of *The Guardian* in the educational aspect of the divide can be ascribed to the paper’s focus on an intellectual target audience.

2.5 Employment

Of all the five indicators involved, in all of the sources analysed most attention is devoted to employment. Here, the focus of the coverage is yet again on the North as the victim

16 Polly Curtis, “A Level Results: Record Year for A Grades That Highlights North South Divide,” *The Guardian*, August 15, 2008, accessed August 23, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/aug/15/alevels.schools?INTCMP=SRCH>.

17 Curtis, “A Level Results: Record Year for A Grades That Highlights North South Divide.”

of the forces that have shaped the divide. The North is generally portrayed as a region blighted by unemployment as a result of past economic policies. The consensus among the sources (with the exception of *The Daily Telegraph*) is that the current problems of the North have been brought about by the de-industrialization of the British economy and a failure to provide viable employment alternatives.

The Daily Mail, for instance, points out how past governments attempted to bridge the North-South employment gap by creating subsidized public sector jobs in the North. However, with the credit crunch of 2008 and the subsequent recession which has brought forth calls for cuts in public spending to reduce the budget deficit, public sector jobs are under threat, laying bare the dependence of the North on government spending. According to an article called "Warning on Structural North South Divide," the only way of pulling the region back from the economic abyss is via innovative private sector solutions.¹⁸ To add urgency to the issue and to appeal to readers' emotions, a strategy typical of *The Daily Mail*, the above-mentioned article is accompanied by a photograph of the Jarrow Crusade of 1936. In this image, jobless working-class men carrying banners can be seen marching to London in protest against unemployment in the North. The implication is clear: the deprivations of the "Hungry Thirties" could soon return in a new form.

The South, on the other hand, is portrayed by the sources as a region with a clear lead in the area of employment. While the overall competitive advantage for the UK over the past 20 years has been in business, finance and other knowledge-driven areas, the South is where most job opportunities are situated. Due to its location and developed infrastructure, the South has been far more successful at attracting private business. Therefore, the region has been better able to deal with the symptoms of the present economic recession than the North with its larger numbers of unskilled workers, a population whom the recession has hit the hardest.

While the prospects of the North are portrayed by the sources as mostly bleak, a number of articles point out some positive developments in the region. These economic successes are almost exclusively tied to innovations in the service sector. They involve transforming former industrial Northern towns into centres for shopping and entertainment and increasing the attractiveness of destinations in the North for tourists wishing to explore Britain beyond London. In an *Independent* article called "Oop 'n' Away as North Rises to the Challenge of Modern Tourism," the author indicates this optimism: "Northern England has thrown off its international reputation as a place of dark satanic mills and boarded-up terraces by confirming its position in the ranks of Britain's top tourist destinations. The post-industrial renaissance of Manchester and Liverpool as well as Birmingham in the West Midlands has seen the cities eclipse the popularity of more traditional – and picturesque – honeypots such as Oxford and Cambridge to report record increases in the number of visitors last year."¹⁹ According to the article, the main attractions for tourists include Premiership football teams, shops, bars, the Imperial War Museum in Salford, the BBC, the Lowry arts centre and other cultural venues. Clearly, the growth experienced by some parts of the North is exclusively related to a service economy; none or very little of it appears to be generated by industry.

18 "Warning on 'Structural' North-South Jobs Divide," *The Daily Mail*, June 13, 2011, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/news/article-1726670/Warning-on-structural-North-South-jobs-divide.htm>.

19 Jonathan Brown, "Oop Oop 'n' Away as North Rises to the Challenge of Modern Tourism," *The Independent*, May 3, 2012, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/hei-fi/entertainment/oop-oop-n-away-as-north-rises-to-the-challenge-of-modern-tourism-7711081.html?origin=internalSearch>.

Concerning the differences in the coverage of employment across the corpus, it can be observed that the left-leaning sources plus the tabloid *The Daily Mail* feature more stories regarding the social implications of the phenomenon. On the other hand, *The Daily Telegraph* tends to view the matter from a purely economic perspective.

2.6 Housing

A major social concern and an undisputed class factor, housing is reported on by all the sources surveyed, particularly by *The Independent* and *The Telegraph*. From its coverage, the North-South divide emerges just as distinctly as it has done with the previous indicators, although this is the first instance in which the North is presented as possessing some advantage (albeit partial) over the South.

House prices and the affordability of property constitute two of the most-featured topics. Here, the North emerges as a far more buyer-friendly region, with property prices significantly lower than in the South; for that reason it is shown as more favourable for first-time buyers. According to *The Guardian*, the most affordable places in the UK are northern towns such as Salford (part of Greater Manchester), Bradford, Derry, Stirling, Belfast and Durham. On the contrary, the least affordable places include the southern cities of Truro (Cornwall), Oxford and Winchester.²⁰ One of the key factors responsible for the discrepancy is the high demand for property in the South, which pushes prices upwards. The low demand for housing in the North, on the other hand, results in greater affordability.

Whereas the right-leaning newspaper *The Telegraph* is mostly preoccupied with house price figures and the influence thereof based on the economic situation, the more centrist or left-leaning sources pay closer attention to the social aspects of the housing market. Although property is cheaper in the North, the adverse economic situation of the region has resulted in a higher rate of house repossessions faced by those unable to pay their mortgages, most frequently due to job loss. An article in *The Independent* called "North-South Divides in House Repossessions" reports that speed of public sector austerity increases unemployment, forcing people into mortgage arrears. The piece predicts that with the continuing economic slump, the North-South divide on repossessions could become even deeper.²¹ According to the author, the only locations exempt from the higher trend of repossessions in the North are towns and other areas inhabited by wealthy retirees, such as the town of Harrogate and the county of Herefordshire.

In addition to repossessions, the North appears to be blighted with another phenomenon – the closure of shops due to lack of business and the subsequent boarding up of buildings. The boarded-up building is used as a recurrent theme in the articles as a symbol of the economic decline, of the demise of the "nation of shopkeepers" unfolding north of the divide. The sense of loss and desolation is expressed by Mark Easton, Home Editor of *BBC News*:

20 Lisa Bachelor, "City Properties Now More Affordable, but North-South Divide Persists," *The Guardian*, March 31, 2012, accessed August 3, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2012/mar/31/house-prices-north-south-divide?INTCMP=SRCH>.

21 "North-South Gap Divides in Home Repossessions," *The Independent*, June 25, 2012, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/hei-fi/business/northsouth-gap-divides-in-home-repossessions-7880669.html?origin=internalSearc>.

Today's research reveals a clear north-south divide. It is a divide which is a legacy of government policy over decades. The Tees Valley in general and Middlesbrough in particular are places which became rich on heavy industry. William Gladstone famously went to the original town hall in Middlesbrough and proclaimed it an 'infant Hercules'. Go to the same spot now, as I did, and you find a sad, boarded-up building surrounded by wasteland and a few abandoned, crumbling houses. The area found it increasingly hard to compete in global markets and, over time, government felt obliged to pump in state support to prop up and regenerate the declining economy. The result is that a town like Middlesbrough has become state-dependent.²²

Thus, the housing situation is inseparably linked to the economic decline of the North: the crumbling house and the crumbling economy go hand in hand. There is no place for optimism in Easton's analysis: dependence on the state in a period of government cuts makes the region highly vulnerable.

3. Conclusion

The majority of articles throughout the corpus seem to be well-informed on the latest social research, quoting the output of the Office for National Statistics, data provided by housing charities (such as Shelter) as well as the findings of Danny Dorling and other social researchers. Greater attention is invariably devoted to the North in the coverage; this logically follows from the fact that it represents the more troubled one of the two regions and, therefore, the issues related to it are regarded as more urgent and newsworthy.

All of the five indicators proposed by Dorling have been reported on by the sources but not to the same extent: employment is the most covered topic, with education being the least. The most detailed analysis of the divide is provided by *The Daily Mail*, which is rather surprising given its tabloid character. This fact can probably be attributed to the paper's heavy emphasis on domestic news and on the "brokenness" of contemporary Britain. All the sources with the exception of *The Telegraph* show interest in the social aspects and impacts of the g. *The Telegraph*, in turn, tends to be more preoccupied with economic data concerning the gap, especially regarding property prices and unemployment statistics. Moreover, *The Telegraph* seems the source least willing to consider the impact of the Thatcherite legacy in the form of the deindustrialization of the whole region. Instead, the newspaper stresses the insufficient infrastructure or even excessively high taxes as the reasons behind the plight of the North. This can be ascribed to the right-wing, pro-Thatcherite bias of the newspaper.

Of all the sources, *The Guardian* demonstrates the highest use of sociological research. Besides providing analysis of the individual indicators, the paper plays almost an activist role (which is understandable given its left-wing bias and preoccupation with social equality), often going beyond mere coverage and offering suggestions for change, e.g. decentralization, the encouragement of local initiatives and the use of pension funds to build houses. At the same time, *The Guardian* is highly critical of the increasing concentration of power in London, a trend that it does not perceive as likely to be reversed in the near future.

²² Mark Easton, "Spending Cuts to Hit North Harder," *BBC News*, September 9, 2010, accessed August 23, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-11141264>.

On the whole, the sources remain rather pessimistic concerning the future of the divide. Although *The Independent* shows some optimism related to the growing attractiveness of tourism in the North, most of the articles expect the future exacerbation of inequality rather than the opposite. The economic recession, the restructuring of the job market and the unwillingness of governments to formulate a long-term strategy for the economic reinvigoration of the North are identified as the major contributing factors.

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Alice Tihelková studied History as well as English and American Studies at Charles University in Prague, where she also obtained her PhD in English Language in 2006. In 2002, she joined the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, where she teaches and researches British Cultural Studies. Her main focus is the structure and character of contemporary British society. She is dedicated to developing innovative and student-friendly ways of teaching British Cultural Studies, with emphasis on the latest developments in Britain's social scene.