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Policy Strategies to Overcome Regional Structural Change:  
A Comparison of Merseyside and the Ruhrgebiet

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1. Merseyside and the Ruhrgebiet: Two experimental grounds for policy strategies to overcome regional structural change in Germany and Britain

Merseyside and the Ruhrgebiet are two traditional industrial regions in Europe which, for a number of reasons, have been hit more by the impact of technological and economic change than other urban agglomerations in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Great Britain. In both regions the transition from the industrial to the post-industrial society has caused enormous social, economic and political problems, which, given the socio-political context in Germany and England, did, and still do require considerable state intervention. Usually central and regional governments strategies do aim at two political goals: supporting the process of industrial innovation and economic regeneration and cushioning the negative social repercussions of this process for the regional population. Both the Ruhrgebiet and Merseyside have experienced a variety of such policy strategies and both regions do continuously experiment with newly developed strategies, hoping that they will, in the long run, succeed to overcome the negative regional impact of structural change.

For decades, the responsible national, regional and local governments and/or institutions in both regions have been responding to those problems, which are felt and articulated by the people, by regional and local politicians and by influential interest groups. In most instances the reaction was geared to just solve a single problem, for which a cause could easily be identified. In a few cases a more comprehensive policy strategy was formulated, but often for a limited time period only.

Given the complexity and the world wide interdependence of causes and effects of structural change, the formulation of consistent and comprehensive policy strategies is certainly much more an academic dream than politically feasible. Moreover, it is not difficult to assess all those strategies which, during the past twentyfive years, have been developed for the Ruhrgebiet and

Fig. 1  
Merseyside and Ruhrgebiet in the European Context

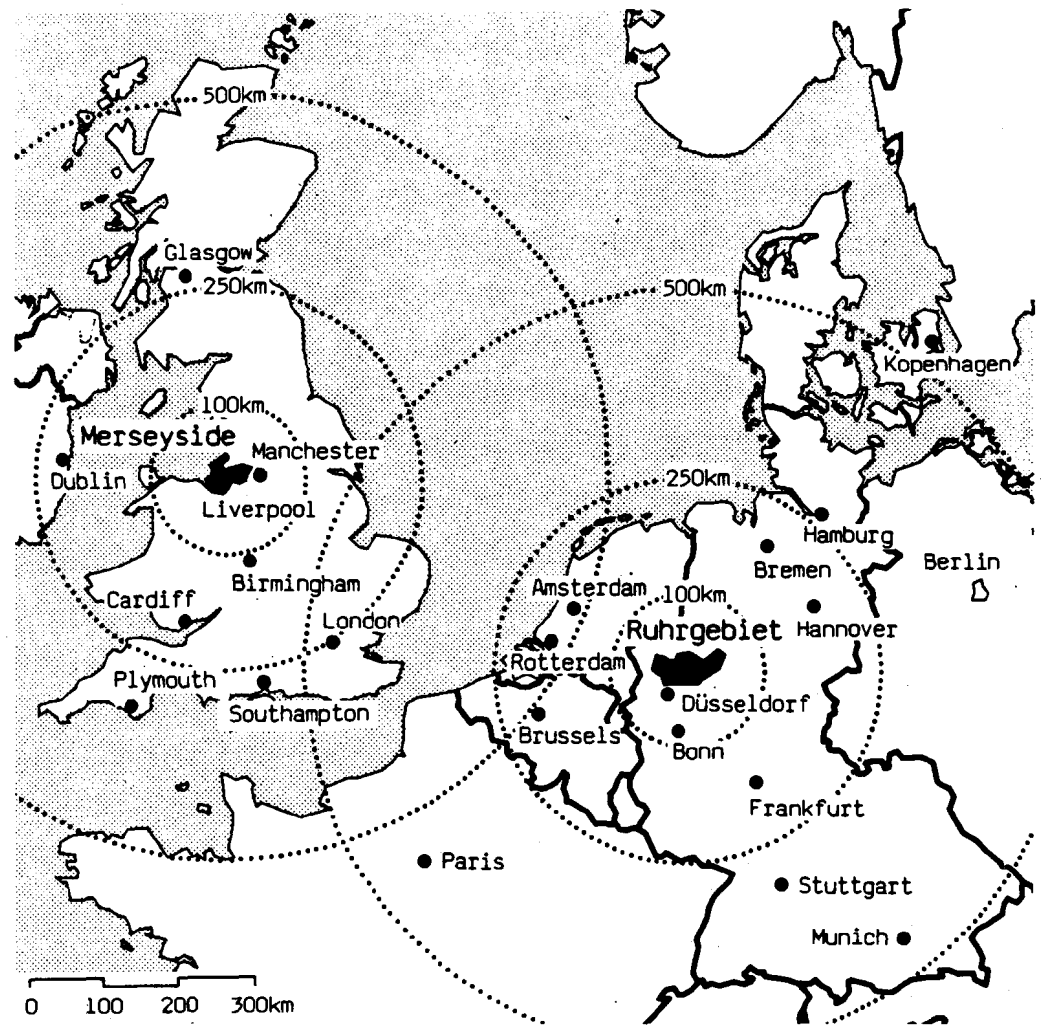


Fig. 2

Merseyside

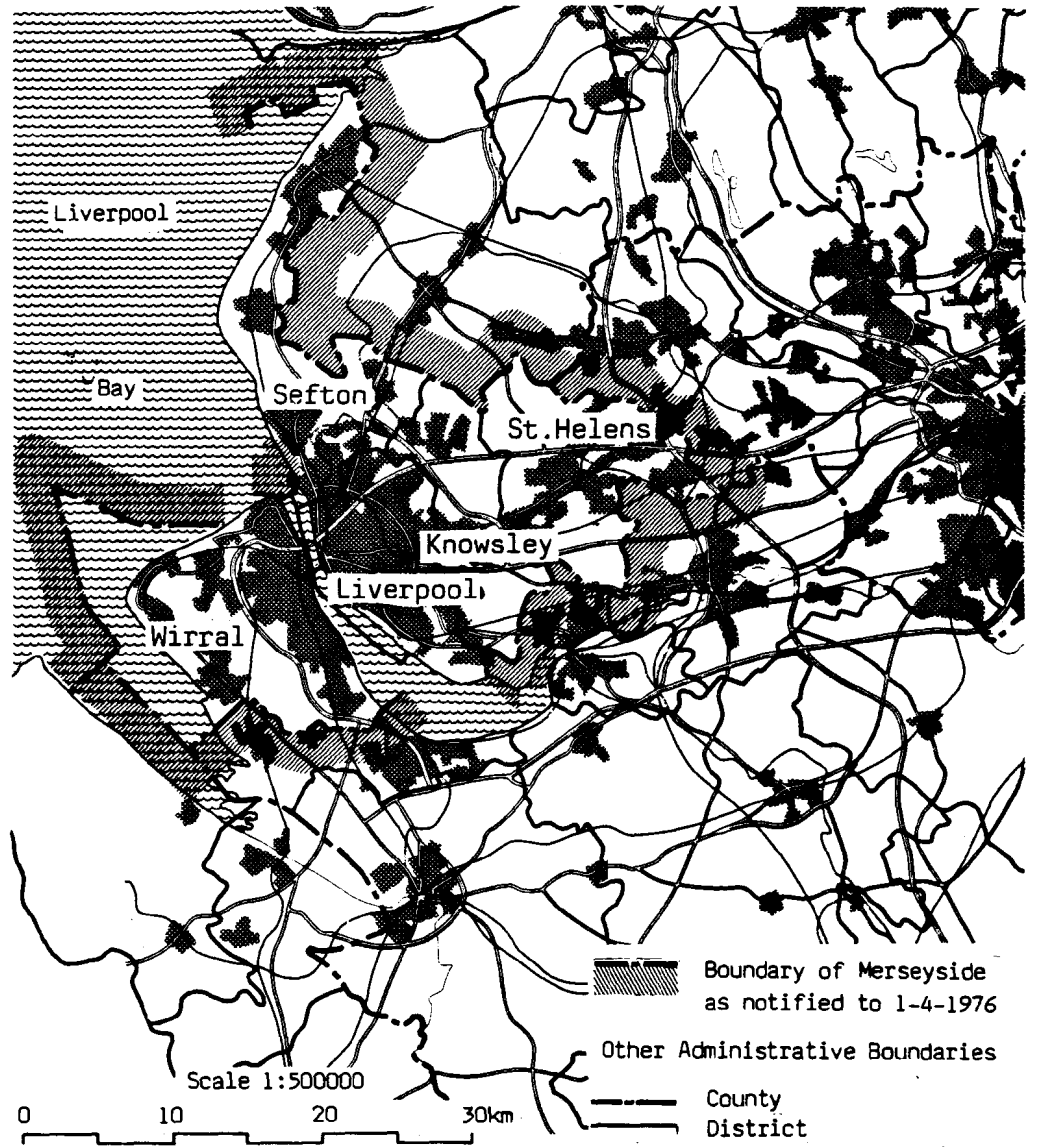


Fig. 3 Ruhrgebiet



for Merseyside without full description of the evolution and the regional causes of structural change, which is not feasible in the context of this paper.

What I can do with three quarters of an hour is

- i. to sketch the regional causes of decline in both regions by describing some similarities and differences,
- ii. to describe past and present policy strategies to overcome regional decline in the Ruhrgebiet and in Merseyside and
- iii. to assess these policy strategies.

Before doing so I will try to justify that the Ruhrgebiet and Merseyside, despite quite considerable differences, are comparable.

## 2. Merseyside and the Ruhrgebiet: Are they comparable?

At a first glance both regions can hardly be compared. Merseyside and the Ruhrgebiet do considerably differ in size and population. Their geographical location is quite different.

Merseyside's economic development in the past was very much linked to Liverpool's function as one of the most important European ports. This port which played an eminent role in the slave trade triangle (Africa to West Indies/North-America to Europe). In addition to the port related trade and industrial activities, textile and manufacturing industries characterized the regional hinterland of Liverpool and Merseyside.

The economic evolution of the Ruhrgebiet to become one of the most powerful industrial regions in Europe was primarily based on coal exploitation and steel production, with a considerable proportion of dependant manufacturing industries. With its 4432 sqkm and its 5,5 million inhabitants in 1978, the Ruhrgebiet is six times bigger in size and utmost four times bigger concerning population size than Merseyside.

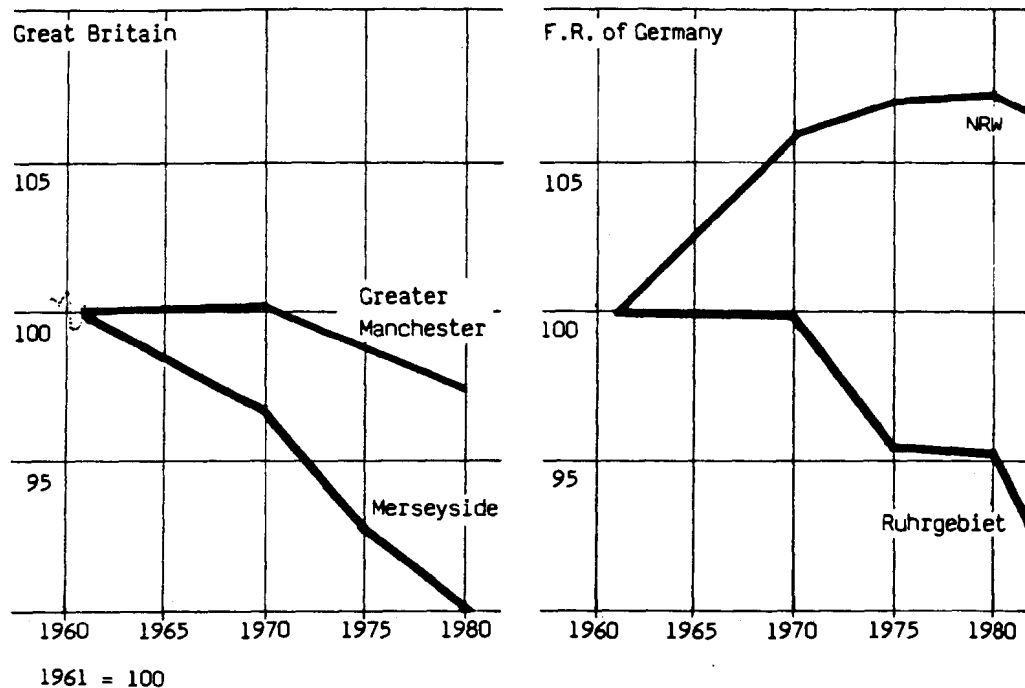
The socio-political context and administrative structure in Britain and Germany and the administrative structures differ. A very much centralized decision-making system in Britain contrasts to the more decentralized system in Germany in which the local governments of the Ruhrgebiet are acting.

However, despite such and many other differences both regions have also a number of common, which do justify a comparative assessment of policy strategies to overcome regional structural change. Such similarities are:

- For decades both regions played (and they still play) an outstanding role for the respective national economy;
- The economic strength of both regions was primarily based on a leading function (in Merseyside the port, in the Ruhrgebiet coal and steel), which determined the overall economic, social and environmental structure of the region;
- Both regions were hit much earlier by the negative impacts of structural change than other urban agglomerations;
- Regarding quality of life, environmental conditions and political culture, both regions have a comparably low profile and image within their country (whether this is justified or not);
- Both regions do suffer from economic decline and structural changes in a much bigger scale than elsewhere in the country and in both regions new strategies and instruments had to be developed and applied;
- Both regions seem to be favourite training grounds for the testing of those new strategies and instruments have been thought out and elaborated by policy advisors and academic thinktanks;
- With their considerable export orientation and dependency both regions are much more affected by altering international trade patterns and shifting world markets than other regions in the respective country.

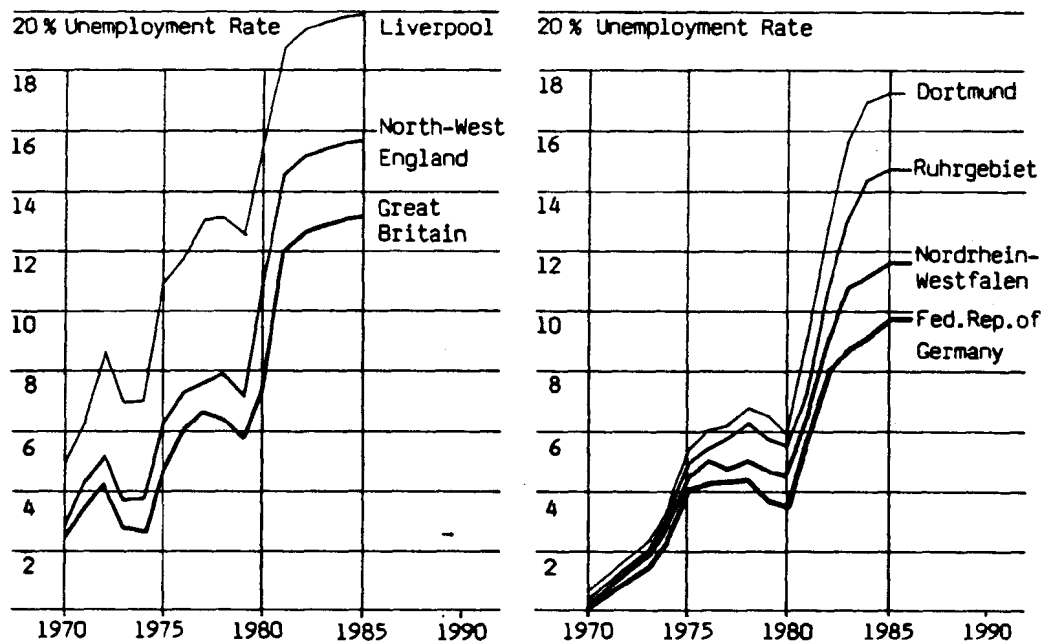
Given such and other reasons it may be legitimate to compare policy strategies for the restructuring of the Ruhrgebiet with those for Merseyside.

Fig. 4  
Population Development of Selected Regions in Great Britain  
and in the Fed.Rep.of Germany (1961 to 1980)



Source: Eurostat, Städte- und Kreisstatistik Ruhrgebiet 1985

Fig. 5  
Unemployment in Great Britain and in the Fed.Rep.of Germany  
(1970 to 1985)



Source: Department of Employment, Monthly Statements.  
Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet (Hrsg.): Arbeitsmarkt Ruhrgebiet,  
various editions.



Table 1: Merseyside and the Ruhrgebiet: Some basic figures

	year	Ruhrgebiet (KVR)	Merseyside (County)
Area (sqkm)		4432	647.89
Population	1980	5,504,215 (1978)	1,545,500
	1976	5,514,467	1,578,000
	1970/71	5,750,479	1,656,544
	1961	5,758,917	1,718,186
	1950/51	4,672,139	1,662,733
Population Development (%)	1961-1976	- 4.2	- 8.2
Population Density	1976	1,244	2,436
Age structure (%)	1976		
Population 0 - 14		20.0	24.0
Population 15 - 20		7.6	62.5
Population 21 - 65		58.1	
Population 65 +		14.3	13.7
Employment structure			
Total employment	1970	2,134,849 (1971)	722,422
- Agriculture		6,571	3,951
- Mining/Industry/Construction		1,191,357	361,711
- Services		936,921	406,760
Total employment	1976	1,808,900	732,645
- Agriculture		7,236	3,576
- Mining/Industry/Construction		1,045,544	306,512
- Services		756,120	422,557
Unemployment Rates (%)	1969	1.5	3.4
	1972	1.7	6.8
	1975	5.2	7.0
	1978	6.0	11.5
	1980	(Sept.) 5.8	(Nov.) 14.6
Economic activity rates (%)			
Males	1961 - 1970	64.0 59.7	(1971) 59.1
Females	1961 1970	22.6 22.6	(1971) 33.1
Total	1961 1970 1979	42.6 39.3 38.0	(1971) 45.5 46.1





























