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Placing Labour Markets in the Evolution of Old Industrial Regions: the Case of Northern Rock [1]

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Abstract

Over the last decade or so, the notion that 'history matters' in understanding processes of economic growth and change has moved centre stage within economic geography research. Attention has focused on the ways in which the pre-existing industrial structure, technologies and institutions in a region or a locality influence their trajectories, whether a new industry develops there, and the ways in which existing industries and firms adapt to change. This paper contributes to the field by arguing for a better understanding of how local labour market contexts are integral causes in the processes and mechanisms of regional economic evolution. We explore how the rise and fall of new paths of growth around Northern Rock and financial services in the North East of England shaped, and were in part shaped by, the historically weak structure of the region's labour market. By integrating analyses of major recruitment and redundancy episodes, we suggest that the North East suffers from a process of occupational disadvantage, limiting the region's absorptive capacity and ability to diversify into more advanced and high-skilled paths of growth.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the labour market dynamics of the rapid growth and decline of Northern Rock, a mortgage bank acutely affected by the 'credit crunch'. Responding to Martin's recent call (2010a: 1) for research effort focused on the economic geographies of financial bubbles and crashes, it offers a novel peripheral region perspective on the emerging post-crisis geographies of finance (Lee *et al*, 2009). Northern Rock is a "critical case" (Barnes *et al* 2007; 10), one of the first high profile casualties of the 'credit crunch' and an early warning of the wider international banking crisis (Marshall *et al*, 2012). Northern Rock had expanded rapidly, growing by 3,500 jobs over the previous decade, and by 2007 was the 5th largest UK mortgage bank with 6,600 staff and a balance sheet of £113.5 billion (Official Journal of the European Union, 2008). However, the inherent fragility of its 'originate and distribute' business model, based on aggressive growth in mortgage lending, capital minimisation and excessive off-balance sheet borrowing, was exposed by a liquidity crisis in the international financial system following the collapse of the American sub-prime mortgages market. As a result, the company was forced to approach the Bank of England for financial support in September 2007, triggering the first depositor run on a major UK retail bank since 1866. In February 2008, the bank was taken into public ownership, and between 2007 and 2010 approximately 2,800 jobs were lost as it restructured to produce a smaller, more focused and financially viable mortgage savings business. In 2010, the bank was split into Northern Rock Asset Management holding the rescued bank's old mortgages and unsecured loans, and Northern Rock plc retaining the saving deposits and new mortgages. In March 2011 a further 680 redundancies were announced at the bank reducing its employment to less than 2000 to prepare for a sale to the private sector.

Northern Rock is an "important episode in the history of bank failures" and a "much analysed case study" of what can go wrong in a bank (Bruno and Llewellyn, 2009: 11). However, neither the academic view that Northern Rock was "a bank that expanded far too fast" (Chick, 2008; 123), nor the soap opera, replete with villains, that was presented in the press and prime time national television, does full justice to the wider regional and national significance of the company. Nor does the official line of the UK Treasury Select Committee (2008) tell the full story where the demise of the company was blamed on the Board of Directors as "the principal authors" (p.3) of a "reckless" (p.3), "fatally flawed" (p.18) business strategy and an "extreme" (p.22) business model which received insufficient scrutiny by regulators who were "asleep on the job" (p.22). Instead, a distinctive – albeit often overlooked – characteristic of the Northern Rock episode was the highly concentrated geographical imprint of the company's growth and decline. In particular, the geographical perspective adopted in this paper allows us to shed new light on the ways in which localities and regions beyond, even peripheral to, the major financial centres were shaped and impacted by the financial 'bubble and crash' at the end of the last decade (Martin 2010b; 2012).

Northern Rock was a dominant regional employer, and an important driver of financial services growth in North East England, an old industrial region. It became "a symbol of the North East's renaissance" (Elliot and Atkinson, 2008; 49), an example of the post-industrial transformation of the region and its successful, albeit belated, participation in the deregulated finance-dominated UK economy. During its rapid rise, between 2000 and 2006, Northern Rock contributed a half of the North East's employment growth in the area of financial intermediation (broadly banking and related services) and was lauded by the region's policy makers as being indicative of a qualitative shift towards a new path of knowledge intensive service-based growth (One NorthEast 2006). In short, for some it came to represent an example of the 'South going North (East)' (Leyshon and Thrift 1989) and the emergence of a new provincial finance centre in the UK economy.

Drawing upon evolutionary approaches to regional development (Boschma and Martin 2010), we situate the case study of Northern Rock within a broader geographical political economy analysis to examine the participation of a peripheral old industrial region in the 'originate and distribute' model of financialisation, which appeared to offer a new growth path in an apparently buoyant financial services industry. We reflect on the processes of continuity and change in such economies, and call for a fuller appreciation of the role of territorial divisions of labour, skills and labour mobility in shaping how such places attract, branch into and develop new economic activities (Allen *et al* 1998; Dunford and Greco 2006; Boschma *et al* 2009). To date, whilst the role of skills, labour mobility and socio-spatial divisions of labour have been acknowledged as important areas in enabling or constraining the evolution of economic landscapes, they remain understudied (Pike *et al* 2009; Boschma *et al* 2009; Henry and Pinch 2000).

To develop this argument, we examine the labour market dynamics associated with the 'originate and distribute' bubble in the North East of England. The short-lived nature of the expansion of Northern Rock provides an opportunity to focus on the creation, redundancy and resettlement of financial service jobs. Unlike the 'snapshot' approach typical of other redundancy studies, dominated by the manufacturing sector (Tomaney *et al* 1999; Finch 1999; Bailey *et al* 2008), we view the contraction of Northern Rock through the lens of the longer term evolution of the firm and its position within the North East economy. We emphasise how Northern Rock's new path of growth was shaped by a corporate strategy designed to exploit its position in a low cost region for labour-intensive mortgage production. The strategy sought to overcome its peripherality from the main UK housing market in the South of the country by providing mortgages remotely, grafting on to its existing North East-based Head Office and IT centre a new financial call and processing centre generating large volumes of low-cost, feminised, routine service work. Thus, despite developing in a new and high growth sector, Northern Rock's expansion echoed and reinforced the historical role of the North East region in the spatial division of labour. The region relied on call centres, administrative and clerical support offices in the public and private sector to replace traditional industrial and manufacturing branch plant decline (Hudson 2000). The Northern Rock case is therefore instructive in highlighting the enduring occupational structure of the region's labour market, and the ways in which diversification into new models of financialisation were rooted within the wider territorial divisions of labour within the region's economy. We argue that this path of financial service employment growth drew heavily upon occupational 'relatedness' within the regional labour market. This raises the prospect that the North East may suffer from a process of 'occupational disadvantage' (Markusen 2004) being shaped by its existing occupational structures, thus limiting its ability to diversify into qualitatively new paths of growth and upgraded economic activities and employment. Indeed, the rapid and extensive resettlement of the redundant workforce demonstrated the region's high levels of 'absorptive capacity' (Bluestone 1984) and 'occupational relatedness' – especially for the generic clerical and sales skills – upon which the bank's growth had been based.

In sum, evoking notions of the historical 'layering' of labour (Massey 1995) as a form of path dependency (Martin 2010b), we argue that rather than serving as an exemplar of the 'South goes North (East)', where activities associated with the City of London spread via Northern Rock to the North East, the development of the company provides a stark example of the fragile position of the North East region in the economic geography of the UK's financial services sector and highlights continuities in, and the path dependent nature of, development in older industrial regions.

In the next section, we outline Northern Rock's role in the extension of financialisation to the North East of England and explore the issues that this raises for studies of regional evolution. We then examine the dependence of the region on employment growth at Northern Rock and the ways in which the growth and the subsequent employment impact of the run on the company was shaped by previous rounds of development. The analysis then moves to focus on the post-redundancy experiences of employees and the ways in which this was shaped by the character of the regional economy and the dominance of lower skilled occupations in the region. In conclusion, we draw out the wider implications of our study for understanding the regional impact of the global financial crisis.

2. Financialisation and Regional Evolution

> "[T]he evolution of place is conditioned within wider territorial divisions of labour, and path dependence can be seen as a product of the succession of roles that a place has played" (Mackinnon *et al* 2009: 139).

For French *et al* (2009: 299), the financial crisis was a "very geographical crisis" that has arisen from "an active use of space at a range of scales and along networks of varying lengths which connect individuals and institutions to, and enrol them within the financial system". Indeed, several inter-linked and geographically-rooted explanations of the financial crisis have developed linking it to over-exploitation in sub-prime housing markets in the US (Wyly *et al* 2009; Langley 2009), and the long standing deregulatory competition between major financial centres, especially London and New York, and the insular everyday geographies of finance that underpin them (French *et al* 2009; Martin 2010a). Other studies have focused on global financial centres as the "portals through which monetary fluctuations, perturbations and shocks originating elsewhere are transmitted down through their domestic systems and economies, with highly geographically differentiated effects on the economies of different regions and cities" (Garretsen *et al* 2009; 144). However, few studies have yet examined the financial crisis from a peripheral region perspective. In a European context, one of the most striking features of the financial crisis and recessionary period was that many of the cities and regions most severely affected were located outside the established heartlands and instead in more peripheral and emerging locations in the financial services sector (Martin 2010a). This raises important questions regarding the fragile, weak and potentially vulnerable nature and participation of activities based in peripheral localities within the global financial system, echoing established notions of peripheral regions as 'global outposts' within international divisions of labour and corporate structures (Hudson 2000).

Studies of regional development have focused on regional evolution (see *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 2010; *Economic Geography, 2009*; and *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2007) as part of a project to develop "a plural, contextual, and institutionally sensitive geographical political economy that … aims to bring together the study of institutions and uneven development" (Mackinnon *et al*, 2009; 131). In this approach 'history matters' as successive rounds of development are influenced by both local context and the legacies of previous development in a "never-ending interplay of path dependence, path creation and path destruction that occurs as actors in different arenas reproduce, mindfully deviate from and transform existing socioeconomic-technological structures, practices and development paths" (Martin and Sunley, 2006; 408; see also Martin, 2010b). An evolutionary perspective is valuable because it provides concepts and approaches that seek to explain how and why:

> [E]conomic transformation proceeds differently in different places, and the mechanisms involved neither originate nor operate evenly across space. The emphasis is on understanding the processes and mechanisms that make for or hinder the adaptation of the economic landscape, and how spatial and historical contingency interact with systemic necessity (Boschma and Martin 2010; 7).

Whilst much progress has been made in understanding the dynamic nature of path dependency, creation and branching, the challenge remains to identify what exactly within a region's economy "follows a path dependent trajectory of development – the region's firms, its industries or the regional economy as a whole" (Boschma and Martin 2010: 9). We respond to this challenge by attempting to broaden both the analytical lens and empirical field of existing evolutionary work. First, studying the growth and decline of Northern Rock provides an opportunity to widen analyses beyond manufacturing industries and instead use the development of new and apparently successful activities in the service sector to reflect on processes of continuity and change in old industrial economies. Second, in focusing on the territorially rooted nature of an important institution involved in the financial crisis, we not only guard against the dangers of accepting the 'geographical detachment' of the financial system (Pike and Pollard, 2010; 30; Pryke, 2006), but we argue that Northern Rock's particular attachment to its place in a peripheral region, shaped its development path. Third, whilst the role of skills, labour mobility and socio-spatial divisions of labour have been acknowledged as important areas in enabling or constraining the evolution of economic landscapes, they remain understudied (Pike *et al* 2009; Boschma *et al* 2009; Henry and Pinch 2000). As such, we argue for a better understanding of how labour and labour markets are integral causes in the processes and mechanisms of regional economic evolution.

To develop this argument we examine the labour market dynamics of Northern Rock's growth and decline. Labour and labour market considerations have, to date, been - to varying degrees – woven into analytical frameworks that focus on the regional path trajectories of firms, technologies, sectors, clusters, networks and innovation systems (Boschma and van der Knaap 1999; Boschma *et al* 2009). There remains, however, a tendency within regional evolutionary approaches to see labour and local labour market contexts as a relatively passive, even subordinate, factor shaping the geographical evolution of the local and regional landscape (Mackinnon *et al*, 2009). Yet, given the historically embedded and geographically differentiated dimensions of labour market processes (Peck 1996; Martin 2000), we seek a better connection and integration of labour and labour market characteristics within existing approaches which draw upon notions of 'historical layering' in explaining how the recombination and conversion of place-dependent factors – technologies, socio-institutional structures and so forth – shape change and adaptation (Martin 2010b; Martin and Sunley 2006). In so doing, we draw on the long tradition of enquiry which explores the role of skills and labour as location factors in investment decisions in corporations and sectors, resonating with traditional conceptualisations of rounds of investment and evolution of the spatial division of labour and spatial circuits of value (Massey 1995; Peck 1996; Smith *et al* 2002). Building on this work, through our study of Northern Rock, we argue that the agency of labour and the structure of labour market geographies play a key role in shaping, conditioning and inflecting evolutionary processes across time and space, and this connection needs to be made much more explicit in evolutionary approaches towards regional development. In much the same way that recent studies have suggested that processes of regional branching occur through related industrial variety (Neffke *et al* 2009), occupations can perform a similar role enabling and constraining diversification opportunities, and places can become specialised and tied to particular roles, reflecting spatial concentrations of either high or low value added activities (Boschma 2009).

Connections can be made to the work of Markusen (2004) and Markusen and Schrock (2001; 11) who argue that regions can develop “occupational advantage” around strengths in particular higher-skilled occupational functions which can be “cross-fertilised”' across a variety of industries and establishments. This approach can be extended to consider the implications for localities or regions with concentrations, even strengths, around low-skilled occupations. This might mean inverted processes of `occupational disadvantage' whereby the occupational profile or relatedness of a locality conditions and mediates the qualitative nature of industrial diversification such as the new financialisation path creation associated with Northern Rock. In other words, the path dependencies shaped by histories of labour skills and specialisation can enable or constrain path branching and new path creation. We develop this insight by drawing upon the concept of regional skills equilibriums, and more latterly ecosystems, brought about by the dynamic interrelations between the demand-side of the labour market (industrial structure; skill requirements of firms) and the way this shapes, and is shaped by, the supply-side (low or high skilled labour; education, training etc) (Finegold and Soskice 1988; Finegold 1999; Wilson and Hogarth 2003; Green 2012). In peripheral regions such as North East England, the structural characteristics of the economy – for example, a high proportion of branch plant operations, relatively limited high-technology, knowledge-based and R&D activities – act as a powerful influence on the character of skills demanded, and subsequently produced, within the region and have resulted in low-skill equilibrium (Dawley and Jones 2009; OECD 2008). There are clear parallels here with notions of path-dependence, and current debates around lock-ins (Hassink 2010; Martin 2010) where the interplay between labour, labour markets and industrial structure, and especially the qualitative functions performed within sectors and the wider territorial divisions of labour, are recognised as important in shaping the evolution of new activities in a regional economy (Dunford and Greco 2006; Smith et al 2002).

Figure 1: Examples of indicators of skills mismatch within an equilibrium scenario

DEMAND		
High	SKILLS GAPS AND SHORTAGES • High wage/high productivity good job slots • Low local educational attainment and skills • High share of skilled employees needed • High vacancy rates for skilled jobs • In-migration of skilled workers	HIGH SKILLS EQUILIBRIUM • High wage/high productivity good job slots • High educational attainment and skills levels • High employment rate/ low unemployment rate • High share of skilled jobs • Balance of in-out migration
Low	LOW SKILLS EQUILIBRIUM • Low wage/low productivity poor job slots • Low local educational attainment and skills • Cycle dependent employment • Low share of skilled employees needed • Out-migration of the more skilled	SKILLS SURPLUS • Low wages/low productivity poor job slots • High local educational attainment and skills • Low share of high skilled job slots • High unemployment rate (of skilled workers) • Out-migration
	Low SUPPLY	High

(source: Figure 2 in Green 2012)

Previous attempts in the North East to create a new path of FDI-led growth in semiconductor fabrication exposed its lack of embeddedness within the region's labour market (Dawley 2007). With little history of semiconductor fabrication within the region, one incoming Transnational Corporation (TNC) was forced to recruit over two thirds of its large- scale high-skilled engineering workforce from outside the region and following its subsequent closure, similar levels of engineers migrated out of the region due the limited "qualitative absorptive capacity" of the local labour market (Bluestone 1984). Whilst the region lacked sufficient occupational relatedness, or transferability, to absorb the specialist semiconductor skills, it was more able to absorb the operative and technical skills within the redundant workforce, which offered sufficient related variety with the region's broader manufacturing and engineering sectors. This example chimes well with the recent focus on resilience (Pike *et al* 2009), exploring the ability of regions to respond to shocks, such as the credit crunch, and making a distinction between adaption as a move further along an established or preconceived path where self-reinforcing processes of lock-in may set in, and adaptability where regions display a dynamic capacity to effect new or multiple trajectories and are more readily able to cope with unforeseen change (Grabher and Stark 1997; Martin 2012). For old industrial regions cases of adaptability are rare, more typical are experiences of weaker adaptation where entrenched path dependent change unfolds shaped through historically inherited patterns of decline. This raises questions about the impact of the large-scale redundancies at Northern Rock on the regional economy and the ability of the regional labour market to respond.

We extend these arguments in a longitudinal analysis of Northern Rock's history and evolution. It is rare to have an opportunity to study truly significant events as they unfold, especially when faced with corporate dynamics which "mutate and blend at a pace incongruent with academic publishing timeframes" (O'Neill 2003: 678). However, by integrating previous CURDS research on the rise of Northern Rock with contemporary evidence collected during the unfolding restructuring process, our research method develops an evolutionary perspective by combining quantitative and qualitative data across multiple rounds of (dis)investment. First, insights into the recent and rapid rise of Northern Rock are drawn from a series of CURDS studies undertaken during the decade preceding the financial crisis. In 1996, Northern Rock was interviewed as part of CURDS research on the building society industry (Marshall *et al* 1997); the company was again included in further research on the demutualisation of building societies in 1998-9 (Marshall *et al* 2003) and then as part of a survey of labour market trends in North East England (CURDS and GHK Consulting, 2004).

Second, the main empirical findings of this paper are based on the Northern Rock Skills Tracking Survey (NRSTS), a large-scale telephone survey designed to research the resettlement outcomes of redundant workers in the 12 months after the bulk of redundancies were made in August 2008 (Regeneris *et al* 2009). The NRSTS was commissioned by One NorthEast, the Regional Development Agency and lead partner in the multi-stakeholder Northern Rock Response Group formed in response to the Northern Rock Restructuring Plan. The NRSTS surveyed resettlement outcomes across the course of the study period, with survey waves conducted at 3, 6 and 12 months post-redundancy. The multi-wave survey design aimed to track the degree of short term turbulence and churn associated with job search, career decisions and retraining - often reported in existing studies into the aftermath of large-scale redundancy events (Bailey *et al* 2008). Overall, 1,288 employees were made redundant as part of the Northern Rock restructuring plan in 2008. Of this total, 161 (12%) redundant workers opted out of the survey process at the time of redundancy, leaving a target survey population of 1,127 (88%) former workers. While the response rate declined over the course of the 3 survey points, the final 12 month survey achieved a relatively high response rate (29% - 322) when compared with similar studies (Tomaney *et al*, 1999; Dawley 2007; Weller 2008; Bailey *et al* 2008). Aggregated across the 3 survey waves, the telephone-survey interviewed a total of 612 individuals during the 12 months – equivalent to 54% of redundant workers resident in the North East (Table 1). The survey sample was representative of the broader redundant workforce in terms of gender and occupational profile across the three waves. Table 2 illustrates the profile of Wave 1 respondents in relation to the data on all redundant workers provided by Northern Rock. Given the overall representativeness of the sample, the only weighting required was a small factor applied to counter the sample's slight underrepresentation in the youngest two age categories.

Third, the NRSTS identified 156 respondents from Survey Wave 2 who were willing to undertake more in-depth semi-structured interviews regarding their redundancy and resettlement experiences. A stratified sample – based on the broader occupational and demographic profile of redundancies – was developed and 25 interviews undertaken. Fourth, in addition to the NRSTS data analysis, our research included three semi-structured interviews with members of the retained Northern Rock Senior Management team. These interviews provided important insights into the evolution of Northern Rock's corporate strategies on recruitment and resettlement, spanning both the company's growth and decline. Finally, the NRSTS and interviews were complemented by a range of secondary materials, including corporate literature (published and unpublished), government reports and labour market data and local and national newspaper reports.

Table 1: Northern Rock telephone survey of redundant workers, Waves 1, 2 and 3

	All redundant workers resident in the North East#	Number of interviews completed(response rate)
Wave 1: November/December 2008	996*	487 (46%)
Wave 2: March/April 2009	1,127	350 (31%)
Wave 3: July/August 2009	1,127	322 (29%)
Waves 1, 2 and 3	1,127	612 (54%) ~

Source: Adapted from Regeneris et al 2009

Notes: Response rate is the % of redundant workers in the North East interviewed in each wave

Target population excludes those redundant workers who opted out of the survey process

* Delays in obtaining up-to-date contact details limited Wave 1's target population to 996 persons

~ Total number of individuals interviewed at some point across the survey

Table 2: Profile of NRSTS Wave 1 Survey Respondents

	Target population of Northern Rock Redundancy		NRSTS Wave 1 Sample Profile	
	%	No.	%	No.
Gender				
Male	40	515	38	185
Female	60	773	62	302
Totals	*100%*	*1288*	*100%*	*487*
Age				
16-24	24%	309	20%	97
25-34	34%	438	29%	143
35-44	14%	181	15%	73
45-54	15%	193	18%	87
55-64	11%	142	16%	77
65 plus	0.20%	2	1%	5
Not Available /Refused	1.8%	23	1%	5
Totals	*100%*	*1288*	*100%*	*487*
Occupational Category				
General Clerical	57.3	738	56.2	273
Head Office Sales	2.9	38	2.8	13
Technical	10.5	135	9.0	43
Sales Management	4.4	57	8.9	43
Technical Management	4.4	57	4.1	20
Management	16.2	209	16.3	79
Senior Management	2.5	32	1.5	7
Assistant Director	1.7	22	1.2	5
Totals	*1288*	*1288*		*487*

3. Financialisation and the ‘originate and distribute’ boom in North East England

A regional perspective on the growth of Northern Rock

Leyshon and Thrift (1989) in their work on ‘South goes North? The Rise of the British Provincial Financial Centre’ speculated on the extent to which Northern Britain would participate in the London-dominated, finance-based growth that followed the ‘Big Bang’ deregulation of financial services in the UK in the mid-1980s. Augar suggests (2009: 149) in his graphic account of the City of London’s role in the global financial crisis, that superficially the rapid growth of Northern Rock looked like an example of the South moving North (East):

> If you had been asked in the spring of 2007 to nominate one company that summed up Britain’s successful transformation from a manufacturing to a service economy, Northern Rock would have been a reasonable choice. Originating as a self-help movement for artisans in the heavy industrial heartland of north-east England, it became an IT-enabled finance house, filling the vacuum left by that region’s industrial decline and offering well-paid jobs in modern air-conditioned offices to 6,000 employees. These children and grandchildren of miners and shipyard workers had learned new skills as members of Britain’s financial services army, an industry at the cutting edge of the country's new knowledge economy.

Northern Rock was an established local mutual building society dating back to 1850 which, following the merger of the Northern Counties and Rock Building Societies in 1965, became a prominent regional employer. It was run by a deeply regionally-embedded business elite with relatively limited experience of the wider financial sector, working with executive directors close to the City of London, that, following the de-mutualisation of the company in 1997, was drawn into the wider processes of financialisation as markets were liberalised and regulatory barriers between them reduced (Marshall *et al* 2012). Within this context, Northern Rock became a prominent exponent of financial innovations associated with the ‘originate and distribute’ form of mortgage lending. This approach to mortgage lending replaced traditional ‘buy and hold’ methods where mortgage assets were held on the balance sheet with the use of new highly complex and opaque forms of off-balance sheet securitised credit. Through its subsequent rapid growth it became a potent symbol of the ability of North East England to participate in the deregulated, finance-driven form of growth fuelled by high levels of consumer debt and the use of housing as an investment stimulating consumer demand (Gamble 2009; Crouch 2009).

Northern Rock's development was shaped by its location in North East England, a classic example of an old industrial region that had experienced substantial economic and social change. Recognised as a 'problem region' since the inter-war period of the 20th century when the traditional heavy industries established in the 19th century began their protracted decline, branch plants attracted to the region by regional policy incentives in the post war period, in turn, proved vulnerable to rationalisation (Tomaney 2006). Not surprisingly, then, growth in finance, and the service sector more generally, in the North East has lagged national growth rates (Buchanan *et al* 2009). Indeed, it was only in the 1990s that the North East's service sector growth outstripped losses in manufacturing and stimulated significant net employment growth for the region (Dawley and Jones 2009). The poor relative performance of the manufacturing sector and the absence of locally headquartered firms restricted the demand for professional financial and business services (Marshall 1979; 1982). The supply of finance and business services was also constrained by the geographical remoteness of the region, too far from London to benefit from either international inward investment or relocation from the capital (Daniels 1995); but close enough to the development of other provincial cities such as Leeds, Manchester and Edinburgh for them to act as centres for regional offices to serve the North East (Marshall 1983), and the latter was intensified by the rationalisation of the branch networks of professional financial and business service firms (Gripaios and Munday 2000). Consumer services were restricted by relatively low incomes and sluggish regional growth, and the North East, thus, became a 'public sector region', acting especially as an administrative and clerical support centre for a number of central government civil service departments (Marshall *et al* 1999; Buchanan *et al* 2009). This role, in turn, made it attractive for call centres in the private and public sector, recreating many of the features of the manufacturing branch plant economy by providing routine forms of service employment only loosely rooted in the region (Richardson *et al* 2000). This reproduction and dependence of the North East region on routine service occupations had a significant influence on Northern Rock's development, shaping its corporate strategy and terms of participation in the global financial system.

In the early 2000s, the region's service employment growth gathered pace and registered above national average growth rates in most service sector activities (Dawley and Jones

2009). Whilst this partly reflected the national expansion of the public sector upon which the North East continued to depend heavily (equivalent to 36% of employment and 28% of GVA output in 2006), financial and business services also emerged as significant drivers of employment and productivity growth (LSC 2007). Between 2000 and 2007 employment in the region's professional, financial and business services grew by 41% (49,000) compared to 16% across Great Britain (Regeneris *et al* 2009). In particular, the area of financial intermediation served as key driver in this growth, with full-time equivalent employment growing by 36% (6,436) between 2000 and 2007 (Table 3). Though in absolute numbers the employment impact was relatively modest, these aggregate patterns of financial and business service sector growth were taken by regional commentators as marking a qualitative shift to a more advanced service sector-led growth in an old industrial region (One NorthEast 2006; Tighe 2007).

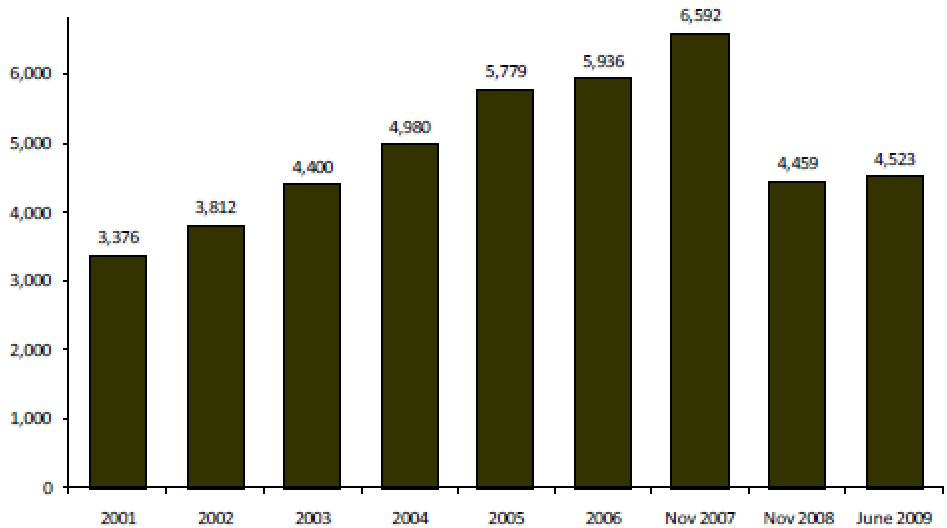
Table 3: Full-time Equivalent Employment in SIC2003 65: Financial intermediation, except insurance and pension funding, 1998 to 2008

	Full-time equivalent employment by year										
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Britain	**555,767.5**	**573,589.5**	**535,547.5**	**571,493.5**	**579,110.0**	**554,927.5**	**546,955.0**	**532,203.0**	**539,899.5**	**533,715.5**	**537,217.5**
North East England	**12,563.5**	**12,197.5**	**11,293.0**	**13,763.5**	**14,650.5**	**14,252.0**	**15,664.0**	**16,297.0**	**17,159.0**	**17,729.5**	**16,337.5**
Tyne & Wear	**6,903.5**	**6,537.5**	**6,495.0**	**8,508.5**	**9,268.0**	**8,759.5**	**11,091.5**	**11,945.5**	**12,178.5**	**12,738.0**	**11,277.5**
Newcastle upon Tyne	**3,108.5**	**2,986.5**	**2,680.5**	**3,224.5**	**3,662.0**	**3,526.0**	**6,552.0**	**6,936.0**	**7,551.0**	**7,768.0**	**5,638.0**

Source: Annual Business Inquiry Employee Analysis (from Nomis on 22 June 2011) ONS Crown Copyright Reserved

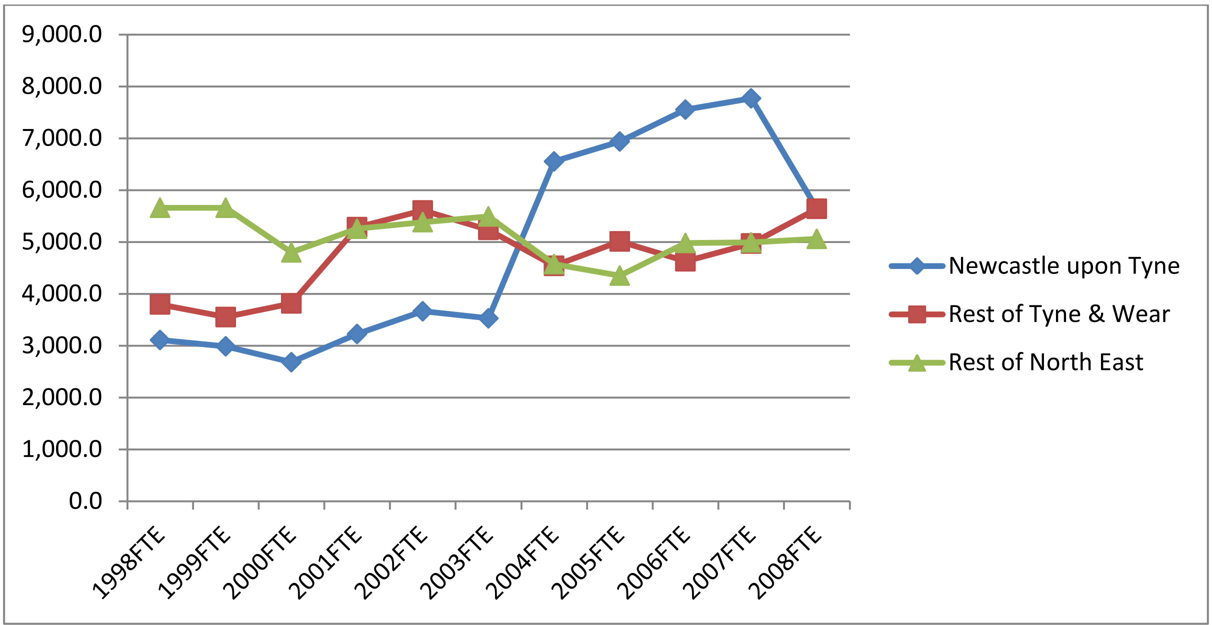
Northern Rock was at the heart of this growth; by 2007, it had 77 branches and approximately 6,600 staff, and was one of the few large corporations with a headquarters in the North East (Official Journal of the European Union, 2008). Approximately 90% (5,980) of its 2007 peak employment was located in the North East England. When Northern Rock's employment increased by almost 3,000 employees between 2000 and 2006 (Figure 2), this was equivalent to 1 in 2 of all full time equivalent jobs created in the North East region's financial intermediation sector (Table 3). Within the region, Northern Rock's employment growth was heavily concentrated at its headquarters in Newcastle upon Tyne and computer centre at Doxford Park in Sunderland. Northern Rock's subsequent impact on the geography of the region's financial intermediation employment was therefore heavily concentrated, indeed dominated, by the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, and to a lesser extent the broader Tyne and Wear sub-region (Figures 3 & 4). More broadly, by 2007, Northern Rock's business activities were estimated to generate direct Gross Value Added (GVA) of around £850 million, equivalent to 2.2% of the North East's total regional GVA in 2006 (Regeneris *et al* 2009).

Figure 2: Change in total Northern Rock employees, 2001 and June 2009



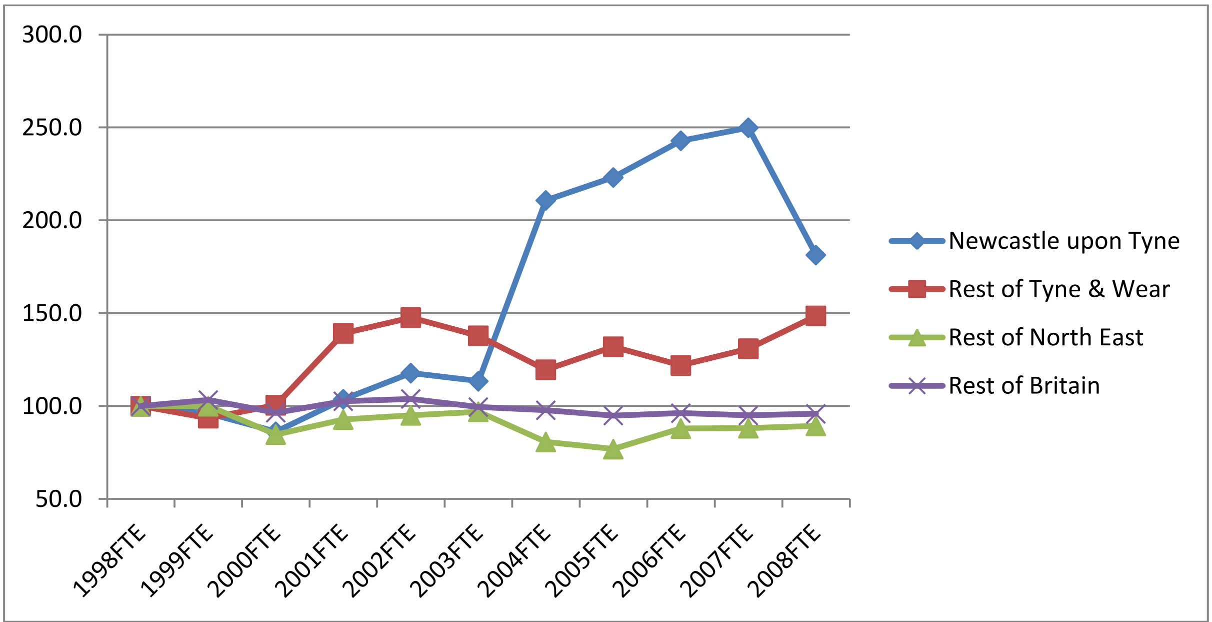
Source: 2000-05 taken from annual report and accounts; 2006-08 date provided by Northern Rock; all data are annual averages, with the exception of 2008 which is the November headcount and 2009 which is the June headcount.

Figure 3: Full-time equivalent employment in SIC2003 65: Financial intermediation, except insurance and pension funding, 1998 to 2008, by sub-region



Source: Annual Business Inquiry Employee Analysis (from Nomis on 22 June 2011) ONS Crown Copyright Reserved

Figure 4: Employment trends (indexed to 1998) for full-time Equivalent Employment in SIC2003 65: Financial intermediation, except insurance and pension funding



Source: Annual Business Inquiry Employee Analysis (from Nomis on 22 June 2011) ONS Crown Copyright Reserved

At one level, the dominant role of Northern Rock in the emerging financial services sector highlights its role as a 'flagship' employer for the North East. But it also began to reflect an extension into the service sector of the region's historical dependency upon a small base of large employers to generate growth (Tomaney 2006). Other aspects of the growth of Northern Rock also revealed continuity with the long term development of the North East rather than the structural change associated with financialisation. Northern Rock's high growth business model viewed the company as a manufacturer of mortgages in an established North Eastern tradition (Marshall *et al*, 2011). The company viewed mortgage production in factory terms and sought to capitalise on the company's location in a low cost region, which they marketed in their publicity as a key competitive advantage:

> Northern Rock is the lowest cost producer in the banking industry in Europe. A key advantage over rivals is that its head office and key operational units are located in the North East of England where wages are, on average, lower than in the rest of the UK. The cost of living is much lower in this area, so people are able to enjoy a high standard of living even though income may be lower. Northern Rock is then able to pass this advantage of low costs to its customers
>
> (http://companyinfo.northernrock.co.uk/downloads/results/NorthernRockFinalV2.pdf)

At the Merrill Lynch European Banking and Insurance Conference in 2003, Adam Applegarth (2003: 14), then Chief Executive of Northern Rock, highlighted that the company had adopted the innovative 'originate and distribute' approach to mortgage lending to produce a "unique and successful business model" focused on delivering high returns for investors via "a virtuous circle" of rapid high quality asset growth, competitive products and tight cost control, based on a "well-balanced funding platform" of wholesale, securitised notes and retail funds "to succeed on narrow margins". The company sought to overcome the perceived disadvantage of their location in a peripheral region remote from the main focus of the growth in the housing market in the South of the country by becoming a "creator and trader of mortgage assets" (Knight, 2006; 14), broadening the mortgage market through simplification of the mortgage selling process via self-certification, selling mortgages remotely via Northern Rock Direct and purchasing near sub-prime mortgages from intermediaries such as Lehman Brothers. This meant the rapid growth of Northern Rock generated only a relatively modest increase in demand for skilled posts in areas such as treasury, audit, accounts, personnel, technical support and general management, and the firm mainly looked beyond the region to buy-in these more qualified staff. The overwhelming majority of workforce expansion was in relatively low-skilled sales and clerical functions. By

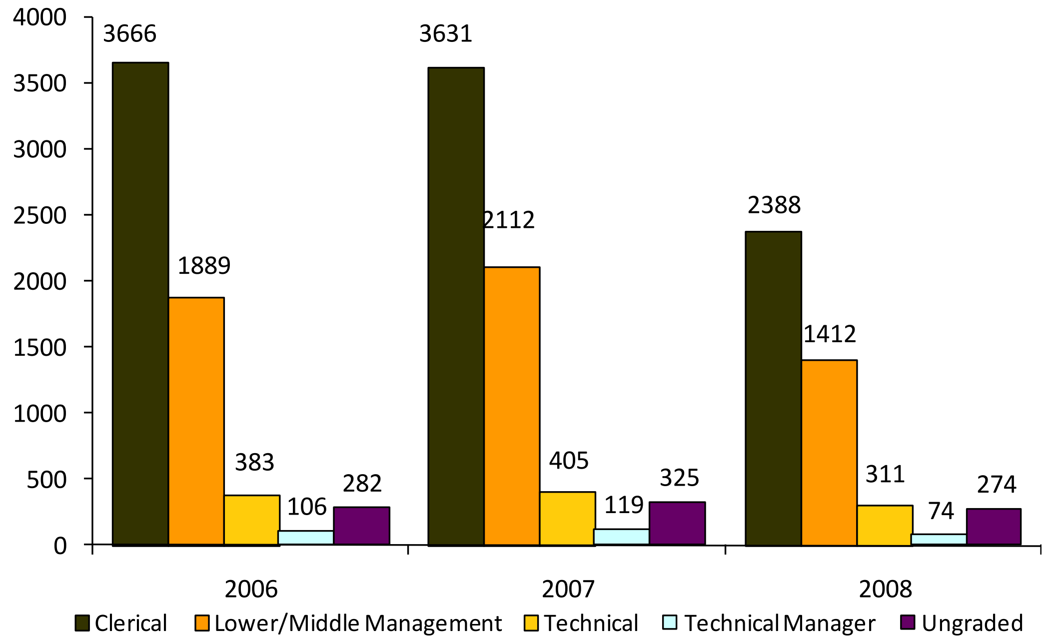
2004, approximately one third of the expanding workforce operated as call centre staff (e.g. telesales and data processing), one third retail and commercial banking staff and the remainder in administration, processing, and general management to support the expanding telebanking operations (CURDS and GHK, 2004). At its peak in 2007, 54% (3631) of Northern Rock's 6,600 workers occupied clerical grades (Figure 5), reinforcing the high dependency of the area on such labour. More broadly, the occupational profile of Northern Rock's growth also mirrored that of the region's labour market at this time. Tyne and Wear, the location of Northern Rock's headquarters and main offices, possessed the third and ninth highest concentrations of sales and secretarial/clerical related occupations of England's 47 sub-regions (LSC, 2007).

Rapid growth and high demand for sales, processing, call and contact occupations resulted in Northern Rock being affected by considerable labour market 'churn', which is frequently associated with lower-skilled segments of local labour markets (Peck 1996). By the early to mid-2000s, staff turnover levels were equivalent to 10-15% of the workforce per annum (Northern Rock Personnel Manager, Authors' Interview 2008). To address low levels of staff retention, the company began to hire based on experience rather than more youthful recruits with few qualifications:

> [W]e were now looking for 'second jobbers' really. That was one of the big changes in recruitment in the last 5-10 years when previously we were recruiting at the bottom end of the market place. Then we increased salaries considerably and we started looking for second jobbers (Northern Rock Personnel Manager, Authors' Interview, 2008).

Even so, Northern Rock's salary levels served only to reproduce the position of the North East as a low wage economy. Despite year on year salary rises, pegged above inflation in the mid-2000s, the company's wages continued to be perceived as "middle quartile for the sector" and "middle rung for the region", having moved from "bottom quartile" (Northern Rock HR Manager, Authors' Interview 2008). In summary, though the growth of Northern Rock and the resulting rise of financial services, contributed to employment growth in the North East during the late 1990s and early 2000s, this growth appears to reflect continuity rather than change in the role played by the region in the spatial division of labour, clearly questioning both the extent to which structural change was associated with financialisation, and that the 'South' was really going 'North' (East).

Figure 5: Employment growth by grade of staff



Source: Regeneris *et al* 2009

Restructuring at Northern Rock

The credit crunch and subsequent global banking crisis was a complex, multi-causal mix of common elements from previous crises. It included macroeconomic imbalances which facilitated an extended global credit boom and in turn accelerated rising asset prices (especially housing); excessive risk taking resulting from irrational exuberance, greed and fraud; and, new elements associated with securitisation, where complex packages of credit were used to extend mortgages, and combined with credit derivatives to hedge risk via so called shadow banking vehicles (see Llewellyn 2010; Brunnermeier 2008; Bank for International Settlements 2009; Davies 2010; & Bank of England 2008 – for an overview). In particular, the lack of transparency in many off-balance sheet vehicles had disguised the many ways through which the 'originate and distribute' model of mortgage lending – based on securitisation – had morphed into 'acquire and arbitrage' as banks bought and sold credit to each other. Indeed, Northern Rock's recent growth model had become reliant (accounting for 75% of its lending), on these complex and opaque processes of funding through the international wholesale markets. When house prices in the US declined and companies specialising in sub-prime lending got into trouble, this resulted in a wider loss of confidence because those banks exposed hoarded liquidity, and other banks were reluctant to lend because it was unclear which other institutions might be involved.

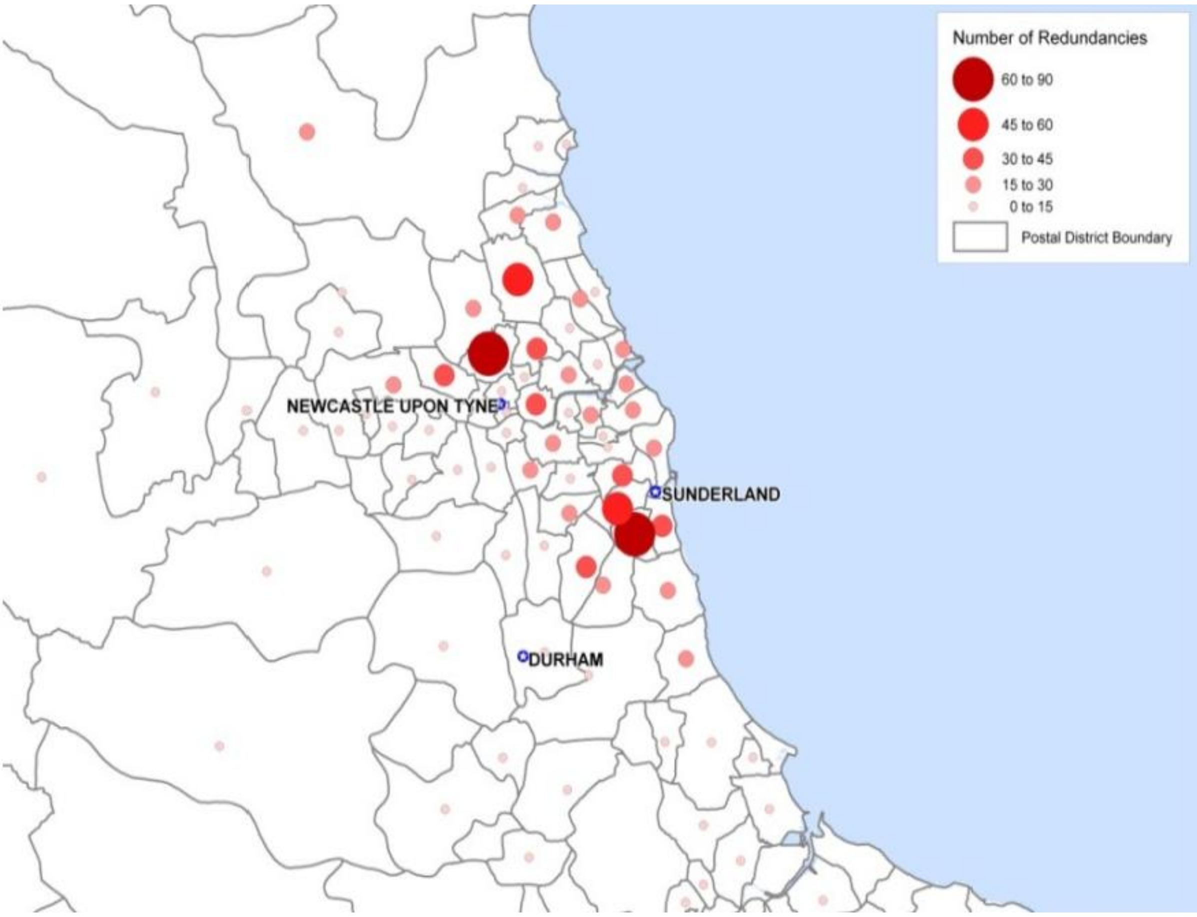
The rapidly tightening credit crunch meant that institutions such as Northern Rock,could no longer rollover their short-term borrowings or sell their assets except at fire-sale prices. On 14th September 2007, the company sought and received a liquidity support facility from the Bank of England. Following a protracted period in which the government sought a private sector buyer, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the company would be taken into temporary public ownership from February 2008. The Northern Rock Restructuring plan, published in March 2008, focused on three core objectives: to repay the financial support provided by the Bank of England (c.£27bn); to re-organise the company to produce a smaller financially viable mortgage operation; and to move towards a more sustainable funding and capital position (Northern Rock, 2008). Given the geographical concentration of Northern Rock's activities, the scale of the restructuring programme had significant implications for the workforce in North East England.

Alongside its broader objective of a 20% reduction in underlying costs, Northern Rock sought a one-third reduction in staff levels, from around 6,000 employees in mid-2008 to 4,000 by 2011. Given the scale of the contraction, compulsory redundancies (62%) predominated, the vast majority (1,152 or 89%) occurring in August 2007, with a further 127 staff being made redundant in the subsequent two months. Reflecting their dominant share of the Northern Rock workforce (62%), the majority of redundant workers (61%) were female. Even so, female workers were more likely to be made compulsorily redundant than their male counterparts (65% versus 50%) indicating the concentration of women in the business functions associated with the bubble and crash and ensuing retrenchment (Lee *et al* 2009; Sutherland 2009).

In terms of understanding the workforce implications of the restructuring programme, several other aspects of the contraction at Northern Rock are distinctive. First, whilst other UK banks underwent similar – even larger – restructuring and redundancy programmes in the wake of the crisis, none impacted on their UK workforces as severely as Northern Rock - which cut 1 in 4 jobs by 2009 (Table 4). Second, none of the other bank's restructuring programmes had such a concentrated local and regional impact as Northern Rock. Some 1,136 (88%) of the workers made redundant at Northern Rock between November 2007 and June 2009 were located in the North East region, and the restructuring programme led to a 33% (1,930) fall in

Northern Rock's North East workforce. Given the company's dominance in the region's financial services, this reduction was equivalent to almost one third (30%) of all the job growth witnessed in the North East's Financial Intermediation sector between 2000 and 2007. The geographical reach of the redundancy footprint within the North East region involved redundant workers resident in 21 out of the North East 22 local authority districts (Regeneris *et al* 2009). However, the focus was also highly localised with 73% of the redundant employees living within the boundaries of the five neighbouring local authorities surrounding the company's Newcastle and Sunderland operations (see Figure 6). More specifically, the Sunderland District (25.4%) and Newcastle District (18.9%) alone accounted for just under a half of all residents in the Northern Rock redundancies.

Figure 6: The geographical concentration of Northern Rock redundancies in North East England



(Source: Regeneris *et al* 2009)

Table 4: UK – Banking Redundancies, July 2008 to November 2009

Bank	Number of redundancies	% of All UK Staff	% of shares held by HM Treasury at the time of recapitalisation
Northern Rock	1,288	25%	100%
Lloyds Banking Group	7,000	5%	43%
Royal Bank of Scotland	7,200	7%	58%
Barclays	6,000	10%	0%
HSBC	2,800	5%	0%

(Source: Regeneris *et al* 2009)

By integrating the episodes of workforce growth and restructuring across the financial bubble and crash, our analysis reveals that the redundancies were concentrated in the functions that grew rapidly as part of Northern Rock's particular business model. The short-term nature of the employment provided is evidenced by the fact that 1 in 5 of redundant workers had worked for Northern Rock for less than two years; three fifths (60%) less than five and the vast the majority had worked for less than 10 years (81%). As Table 5 indicates, the redundancies were heavily concentrated within the mortgage sales (37%), processing (32%) and related IT functions (13%). In terms of broad occupational groups, redundancies were concentrated on the clerical grades and sales (64%), lower and middle management (16%) and technical grades (13%) involved in the earlier growth.

Table 5: Northern Rock Redundancies by Business Function and Grade

Business Function	% of Redundancies	Occupational Grade	% of Redundancies
Mortgage Operations	37	General Clerical	52
Sales	32	Lower/Middle Management	16
Information Technology	13	Technical	9
Training	6	Sales Management	9
Debt Management	2	Technical Management	4
Savings	2	Clerical Sales	3
Human Resources	2	Head Office Sales	3
Customer Services	2	Senior Management	3
Executives	1	Other	1
Others	3		
Total	**100%**	**Total**	**100%**

(Source: Regeneris *et al* 2009)

In summary, taking a peripheral region perspective towards the economic geography of the 'originate and distribute' financial boom and crash highlights the continuity in the North East region's development. The growth and subsequent crisis at Northern Rock was produced by a corporate strategy designed to exploit its location in a low cost region for labour-intensive mortgage production. Given the scale of Northern Rock's dominance of financial services employment in the North East, it would be reasonable to assume there was limited 'absorptive capacity' to reemploy the redundant workers within the region's remaining financial sector. However, this is counterbalanced by the fact that the vast majority of redundancies were neither highly-skilled nor specific to the financial sector. The following section draws upon our labour market tracking study to trace the labour market outcomes of workers made redundant at Northern Rock.

4. Redundancy and resettlement

Labour market outcomes

Studies of large scale redundancies and plant closures suggest that the patterns and process of resettlement are mediated by the demand conditions within and beyond the local and regional labour market (Weller 2008; Pinch and Mason 1991; Dawley 2007). The Northern Rock redundancies occurred as the UK entered recession in the third quarter of 2008 and in the context of a rapidly rising rate of national unemployment. Between October and December 2008, the North East registered the highest rate of unemployment within the UK at 8.4%. For the North East, this represented a 0.4 percentage increase on the previous quarter and a 2.6% year-on-year change – the latter being the highest percentage change of any region (Labour Force Survey 2009; Dawley and Jones 2009). The Banking, Finance & Insurance sector was central to the falling demand for labour, with 7,800 jobs lost in Tyne and Wear between 2007 and 2008 (Regeneris *et al* 2009). As a consequence, between January and July 2009, the Banking, Finance and Insurance sectors witnessed the biggest fall in vacancies (17%; 6,300) posted with Tyne and Wear's Job Centre Plus – the government funded job agency which captures most, albeit not all, posted vacancies (Regeneris *et al* 2009). More specifically, employment loss in the Financial Intermediation sub-sector was most pronounced in the city of Newcastle, with the loss of 2,130 full-time equivalent jobs between 2007-8 (ONS 2011). However, elsewhere in the region Financial Intermediation employment registered a slight increase in Tyne and Wear (669) and the broader North East region (68) (Table 3; ONS 2011). Limits in data availability prevent an analysis of employment impacts beyond 2008; but we suggest that this early geographical divergence reflects how the consequences of the onset of economic crisis were most rapidly felt in the areas, primarily Newcastle, which experienced the biggest growth rates during the bubble prior to the crash (Martin 2012).

Looking across the 3 survey waves, the gradual increase in re-employment broadly follows the pattern found in the existing literature (Bailey *et al* 2008). Between 3, 6 and 12 months, employment rates (including self-employment) of respondents rose from 36% (173) to 52% (181) and eventually reached 61% (196) respectively with employment rates for men (62%) and women (60%) being broadly similar. Conversely, respondents claiming to be unemployed fell by 23 percentage points from 49% (239) to 26% (83) between the 3 and 12 month surveys, and again this was similar for both men and women, albeit with a slightly lower unemployment rate for males (23%) than females (28%). Therefore, over the course of a year the percentage point rise in employment (25%) broadly mirrored the reduction in unemployment (23%). However, whilst unemployment rates had fallen to 1 in 4 respondents, the inter-wave analysis suggests an emerging, and sizable minority of long-term unemployed moving further away from the labour market. Only 15% of those unemployed at 12 months had undertaken any work since leaving Northern Rock, with almost 90% of the cohort accumulating over 40 weeks of unemployment. Similar to previous studies in manufacturing sectors, the NRSTS revealed that former workers aged 55 years or over contributed disproportionately to this category (Shuttleworth *et al* 2005; Armstrong *et al* 2008). Nevertheless, given the depressed state of the local and regional labour market at the time, the findings illustrate a relatively high (61%, 196) level of post-redundancy employment at 12 months compared to previous studies of largely blue collar redundancies (e.g. Tomaney *et al* 1999; Bailey *et al* 2008). By unpacking the spatial, occupational and sectoral dynamics of reemployment, we can better understand the relatively high-levels of re-employment at a time of rising unemployment in the regional labour market.

It is generally agreed within the existing literature focused on blue-collar redundancies that reemployment rates are highest amongst workers drawn from higher-level occupations (Dawley 2007). However, while occupational categories are influential in shaping labour market outcomes in the case of Northern Rock, they do so in a significantly different manner. Given the occupational composition of the former Northern Rock workforce, the aggregate data reveals that General Clerical, Clerical Sales and associated grades make up the majority of both employed (60%; 89) and unemployed (31%; 26) categories at 12 months post-redundancy. However, when analysed as a proportion of each former occupation, Clerical Sales, General Clerical and Customer Services exhibit a higher employment rate (68%; 92) than former Management grade respondents (55%; 47). Even taking into the account the higher post-redundancy retirement rates among former Management grades, unemployment rates of former Management grades respondents (28%; 24) remain higher than General Clerical, Clerical Sales and associated grades (19%; 26).

The occupational evidence also offers insights into the gender dimensions of resettlement. At the aggregate level, 63% of respondents were female, mirroring closely the gender profile of all redundancies made (61%) and overall composition of the former Northern Rock workforce (62%). Therefore the majority of redundancies in the large volume occupations were filled by women, including 66% (169) of general clerical and sales respondents.

However, given the absolute and relative composition of females in the redundant workforce, women also comprise the majority of respondents in former Technical and Management grade occupations (54%; 109), indicating a more balanced but still pervasive role in the former Northern Rock workforce (Sutherland 2009). Similarly, when we analyse re-employment by the qualification profile of respondents, the highest rates of employment were achieved by respondents with intermediate level qualifications, NVQ/GNVQ Level 1 or 2 (76%), HNC/HND (67%) or A-Level (65%). In contrast, the employment rate of those with a university degree or above (49%) is lower than respondents with a highest level of school leaver qualification of GCSE (59%). In fact, the employment rates of the highest qualified increased the least of all categories during the 12 month survey period.

There are clearly numerous supply and demand-side influences on the resettlement experience of redundant workers (Pinch and Mason 1991; Peck 1996; Weller 2008) but taken together the roles of occupations and qualifications provide important insights into the 'absorptive capacity' and labour demand within the North East labour market (Bluestone 1984). On the supply-side, elements of the explanation include workers aspirations, social networks, the relative reservation wages of higher-skilled respondents, a longer and more specific job search; all shaped by tightening labour demand in more specialist fields during the recession (Authors' Interviews 2009; see also Bailey *et al* 2008; Weller 2008). But part of the explanation also reflects the nature of the demand side in the North East labour market, which we have suggested is situated in a low-skills equilibrium (Dawley and Jones 2009; One NorthEast 2006) with labour demand being greatest at lower and intermediate levels. As a result, our analysis suggests that the post-redundancy outcomes of Northern Rock have been shaped by similar historical labour market trends to those previously associated with the region's manufacturing branch plant, public sector and call centre economy activities (Phelps *et al* 2003).

A more detailed examination of the sectoral dimensions of re-employment allows us to extend our understanding of the impacts of Northern Rock's growth and decline on the North East's labour market. Several redundancy and plant closure studies have revealed that workers seek reemployment within related sectors to better utilise and valorise their skills and experiences through comparable wages (Armstrong 2006; Bailey *et al* 2008). Studies also indicate that in the face of reduced demand in local and regional labour markets, workers from high-skilled occupations may look to migrate to follow their chosen career again facilitating sectoral continuity. In the case of Northern Rock, not only did the overwhelming majority of workers (98.5%) surveyed remain within the North East labour market but they transferred into other sectors to secure re-employment. Twelve months after redundancy, our analysis reveals that only 14% of respondents claimed to have found new employment in Financial Intermediation activities. In contrast, the largest single sector of reemployment was Health and Social work (27%), followed by Public Administration (13%); Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities (12%) and Retail (10%). Whilst many workers experienced sectoral change, there was nevertheless a strong degree of functional and occupational continuity. Indeed, many workers found reemployment in the call-centre operations of employers in areas as varied as Health (National Health Service), Telecommunications and Energy. Over half of respondents to the 12 month survey classified their re-employment to be either Administrative or Secretarial (34%) and Sales and Customer Service (23%) occupations. As such, the findings not only illustrate the strength of labour demand within these fields, even during times of recession, but also the non-financially specific skills recruited and developed at Northern Rock prior to restructuring:

> [T]o be perfectly honest I think our redundant staff complemented firms operating in shared services and call centre activities, such as Orange, Sage, Convergis, Fusion. The companies that we have been working with to resettle the workers are mostly looking for sales, customers service advisors or telephone skills (Northern Rock HR Manager, Authors' Interview, 2008).

As well as call centres, occupational continuity is also displayed in the large numbers of workers reemployed in the data-processing operations of the region's civil service operations, along with the clerical and administrative functions of many local authorities. Both these sectors are, of course, currently under threat from the UK Coalition Government's deficit reduction plans which require significant reductions in public expenditure.

Northern Rock's very dominance in the financial sector in the North East and the severity of its reduced labour demand, coupled with job losses across the region's banking sector more broadly, help explain the low levels of reemployment in Financial Intermediation. This restates the vulnerability of sectoral employment given the dominance of one key employer, and echoes previous tendencies in the region's manufacturing sector (Checkland 1975; Hudson 2000). However, it also exposes the relative underdevelopment of the financial services sector in the North East, especially when compared to the case of MG Rover plant closure and the subsequent resettlement of engineering skills within the region's broader and deeper manufacturing sector (Bailey *et al* 2008).

The NRSTS also examined the nature of re-employment outcomes. Full-time employment was attained by 76% of respondents, with part-time employment most prevalent amongst former General Clerical and Customer Service staff. As a measure of the stability of resettlement outcomes, almost 1 in 4 respondents had held more than one job in the 12 months since redundancy, encompassing relatively equal proportions of former Management grade workers as General Clerical and Sales. Moreover, at 12 months just under half of all those in employment (45%) perceived their current job to be long-term (2 years or more). Even so, in the aftermath of the redundancies, a significant minority of redundant workers were involved in processes of labour market churning. Indeed, 12 months after redundancy 1 in 3 respondents in employment (34%) claimed they were actively seeking an alternative job, whilst 20% of respondents perceived their current position as only short-term (6 months or less).

There are several reasons for this instability. On the demand side we can look to the enhanced flexibility of employment opportunities in a segment of the labour market already characterised by high-rates of job turnover and churn (Green and Turok 2000). On the supply side, our interviews with redundant workers revealed the degree to which former workers sought ‘stop-gap’ employment opportunities in the absence of longer term solutions (Weller 2008). Indeed, as a potential driver of ongoing movements between jobs, our analysis revealed widespread reductions in post-redundancy salary levels. This trend was particularly pronounced in lower-skilled categories, reflecting lower reservation wages and levels of post-redundancy financial security explaining higher employment rates relative to former Management grade workers. Overall, 70% of respondents perceived their current salaries to be lower than at Northern Rock, compared to 13% equivalent and 17% higher. The most severe slippages were concentrated at the lowest- salary levels, with over half of those earning £15,000-24,999 at Northern Rock now earning below £15,000. This evidence helps place the relatively high levels of reemployment in a richer labour market context.

Finally, it has been argued that institutional support packages serve as an important regulatory intermediary shaping the interface of labour demand and supply in the post-redundancy context (Bailey *et al* 2008). Following a series of closures and large scale redundancies witnessed during the late 1990s, the North East region pioneered the rapid-response multi-agency institutional Task Force in response to plant closure and large scale redundancies (Pike 2002; Bailey *et al* 2008). Indeed, the effectiveness of such institutions in resettling redundant workers has been much studied in recent years, including central government audits around high-profile closures, such as MG Rover (National Audit Office 2006; Bailey and MacNeill 2008). Given the scale and profile of the Northern Rock restructuring programme, on the request of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the North East's regional development agency (One NorthEast) formed the Northern Rock Response Group involving Northern Rock, Job Centre Plus, Learning and Skills Council, Business Link North East, North East Chamber of Commerce, CBI, Newcastle City Council and Sunderland City Council. In coordination with the Response Group, Northern Rock developed a range of outplacement support packages in addition to broader support made available through Jobs Fairs, vacancy websites, benefits advice and one-to-one careers advice and training.

Significantly, according to Northern Rock's records, only a small majority (53%) of workers engaged with the support offered packages offered (Regeneris *et al* 2009), less than reported in previous studies of Response Groups within the North East's manufacturing sector (Dawley 2007; 2009). In particular, data from NRSTS reveals that only 13% (40) respondents claimed to have found their new employment through the support channels offered by the Response Group. Instead, independent web searches (18%), media advertisements (16%), personal networks (15%) and recruitment agencies (12%) were cited as being the most influential ways in finding new employment opportunities. Our interviews revealed that the trend towards independent job searches and low levels of engagement reflected a pessimistic assessment of labour market opportunities and the potential contribution of institutional support in finding employment at a time of recession, especially among lower-skilled workers. Indeed, the higher levels of engagement witnessed amongst intermediate and higher level occupation groups, served to highlight the differing levels of workers aspirations and use of formal and informal regulatory structures between different segments of the workforce and the labour market (Weller 2008). The limited influence of the institutional support programme on the post-redundancy employee experience also supports our overall argument that the re-employment outcomes following the redundancies at Northern Rock reflects the higher absorptive capacity for low wage routine service employment of local labour markets in North East England.

5. Conclusion

This paper has responded to Martin's (2010a) call to investigate the economic geographies of the ongoing global financial crisis by exploring the labour market dynamics of the 'originate and distribute' financial bubble and crash in the North East of England. We analysed the growth and retrenchment of Northern Rock's workforce and examined the evolution of an old industrial region in response to financialisation, the expansion of new forms of finance, and the ways in which the legacies of previous rounds of development shaped the new employment created. This evolutionary perspective avoids the geographical detachment associated with popular misconceptions of a 'placeless' financial sector, and also broadens the analytical lens of recent regional research by providing new evidence from a service sector redundancy involving routine service work rather than the manufacturing case studies that dominate in the literature. Given the dominance of manufacturing and engineering case studies in the plant-closure and redundancy literature, our approach also offers novel insights into the extent to which processes and outcomes of financial sector redundancies compare with their historical predecessors (Shuttleworth *et al* 2005; Tomaney *et al* 1999).

The Northern Rock case is instructive because it highlights the enduring occupational structure of the region's labour market, and the ways in which diversification into new models of financialised growth were rooted within the wider territorial divisions of labour within the region's economy. History and place play important roles in understanding geographies of path development, suggesting that – amongst other place dependent economic and social variables – the pre-existing industrial structure, technologies and institutions in a region or a locality influence their trajectories, whether a new industry develops there, and the ways in which existing industries and firms adapt to change (Martin 2010a; 6). Drawing upon the long tradition of research on the evolution of spatial divisions of labour and spatial circuits of value in rounds of investment (Massey 1995) we argue that labour, labour markets and the territorial division of labour more widely play a similar role in shaping this regional evolution. In the case of Northern Rock, and its role in the rise of the financial services sector in North East England, the 'originate and distribute' business model, developed by a regionally embedded business elite, used existing patterns of uneven development and the location of the company in a low cost region for clerical labour to underpin its corporate strategy. The predominance of highly feminised routine labour in its financial call and IT processing centre model of mortgage provision further reinforced the established position of the region in the spatial division of labour as a source of routine clerical labour for the public and private sectors. Rather than an exemplar of structural change and the ‘South goes North (East)’, where activities associated with the City of London spread via Northern Rock to the North East, the study highlights continuities in, and the path dependent nature of, the North East region’s development. Our findings raise the prospect that such old industrial regions suffer from a process of ‘occupational disadvantage’ (Markusen 2004) limiting their adaptive capacity and ability to diversify into qualitatively new paths of growth or upgrade economic activities and employment.

Reinforcing this conclusion, the NRSTS reveals that following the run on Northern Rock, the labour resettlement processes were highly localised and concentrated with the bulk of the redundant workers resettled through a localised occupational labour market for low and intermediate skilled labour closely aligned with the absorptive capacity of the North East's labour market (Bluestone, 1984). Although the resettlement of Northern Rock’s workforce was arguably relatively successful in terms of the numbers finding jobs, it was characterised by widespread reductions in salary levels especially towards the bottom of the earnings profile. This conclusion can be linked to emerging debates around regional economic resilience, as a notion seeking to capture the differential and uneven ability of places to respond and cope with uncertain, volatile and rapid change (Christopherson *et al* 2010). The North East adapted to the significant shock from the credit crunch via a ‘low road’ form of resilience based upon relatively low skilled occupations. The evidence presented here appears to suggest that the North East region has a persistently high level of demand for low to intermediate level jobs which is embedded in the broader industrial and economic structure of the region (Dawley and Jones 2009; OECD 2008). Given that the region’s absorptive capacity is situated in the very sectors and occupations which over the longer term are most vulnerable to further rounds of restructuring, the region’s economic problems are deep seated notwithstanding the region’s response to the financial crisis.

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